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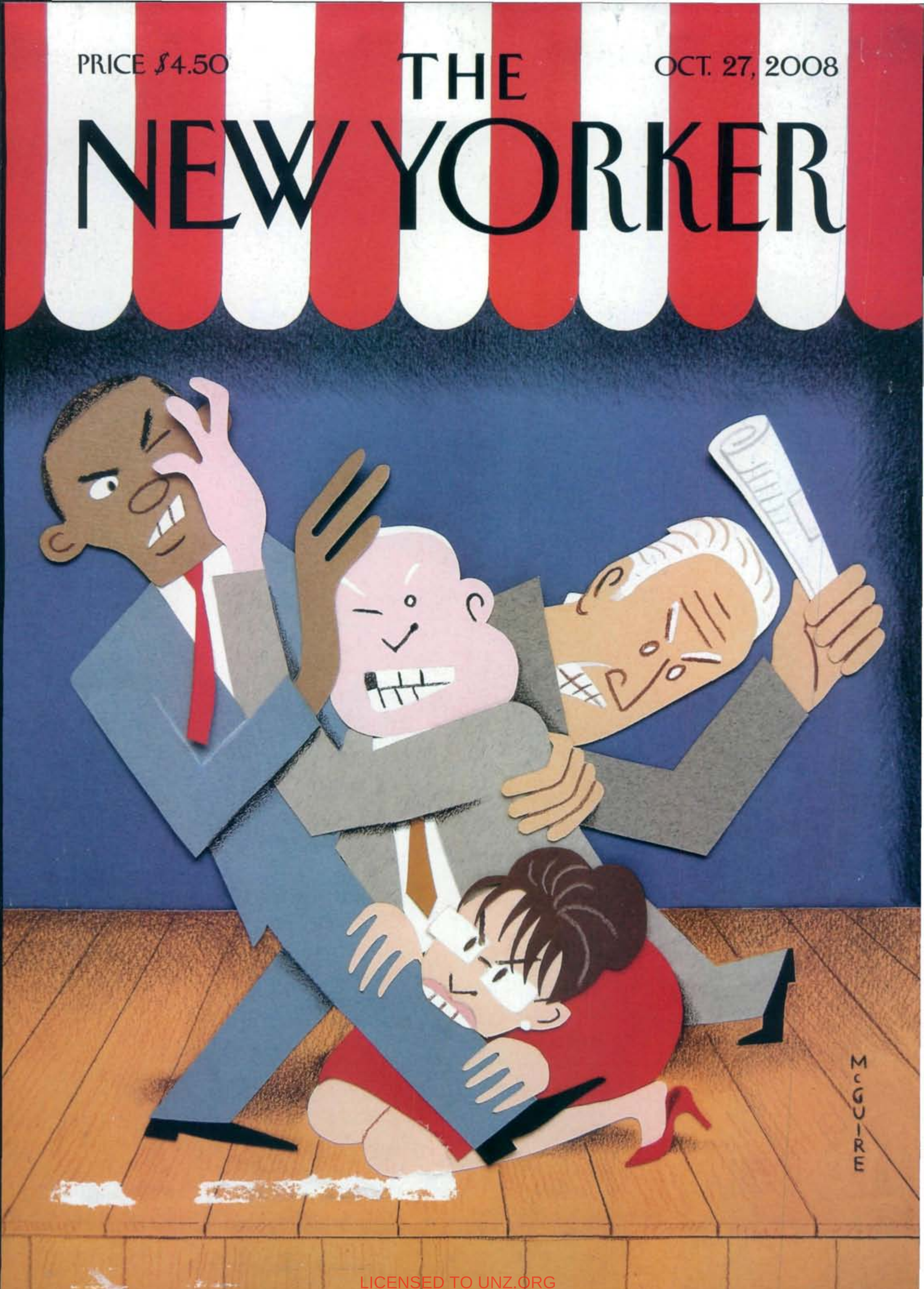
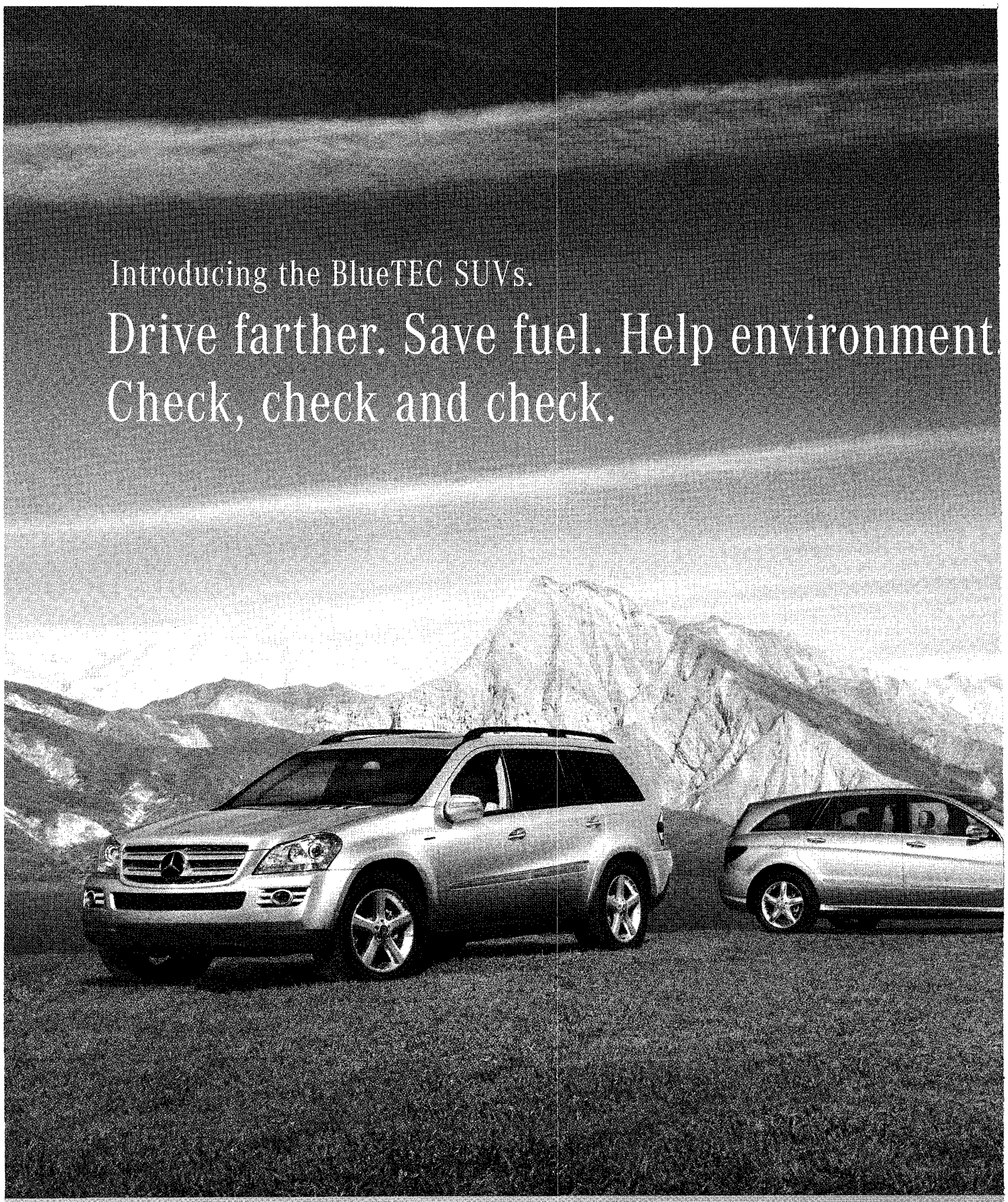
# THE NEW YORKER





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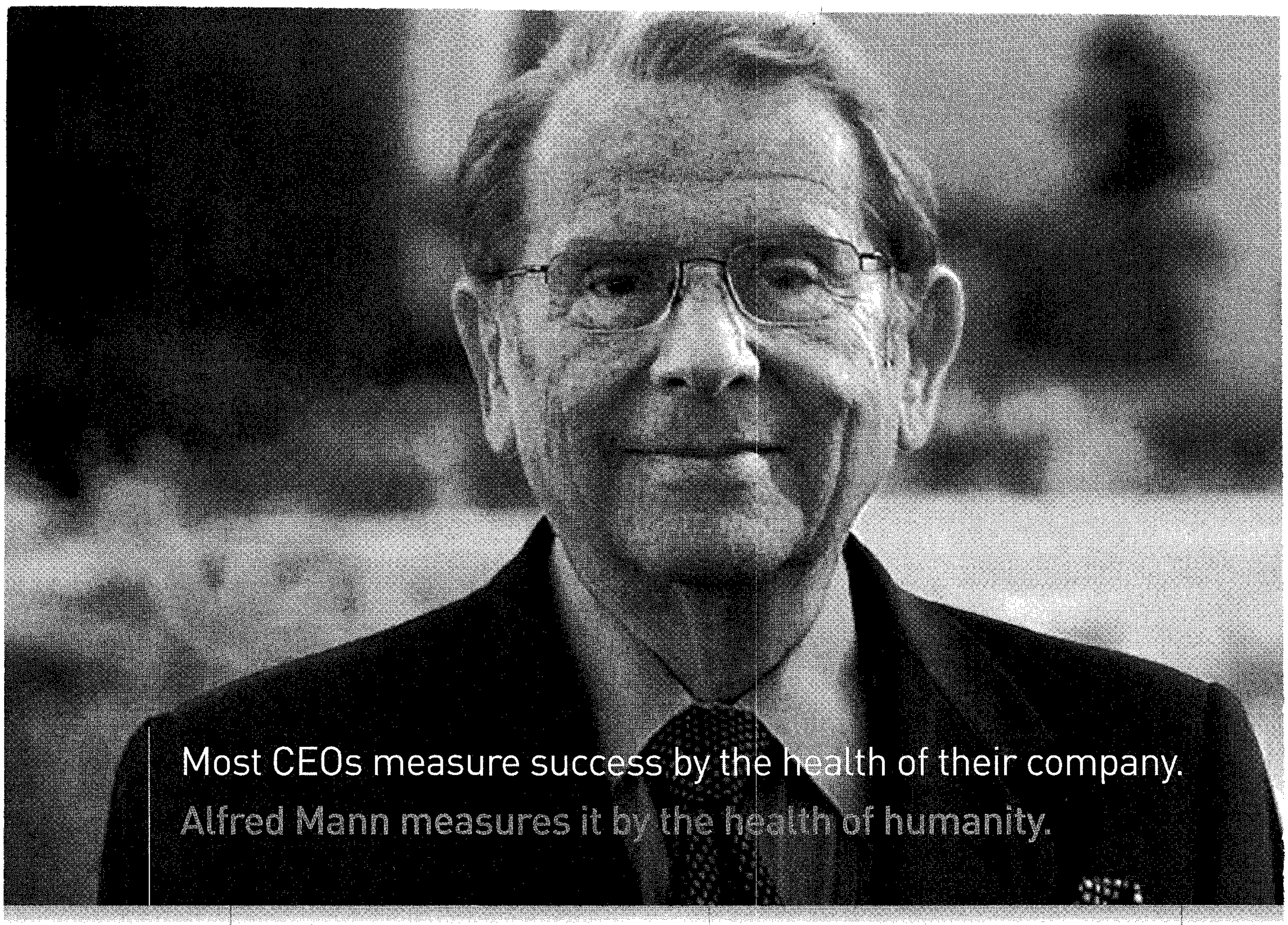
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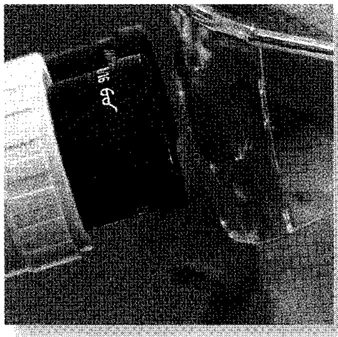

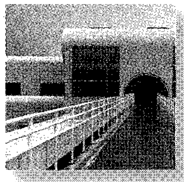

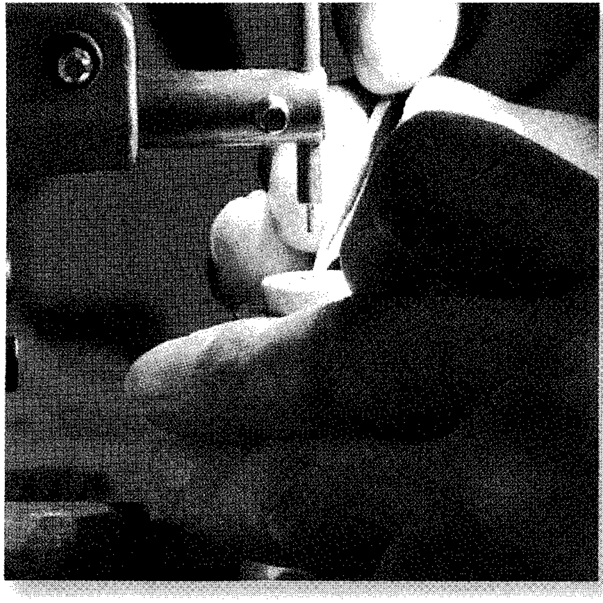

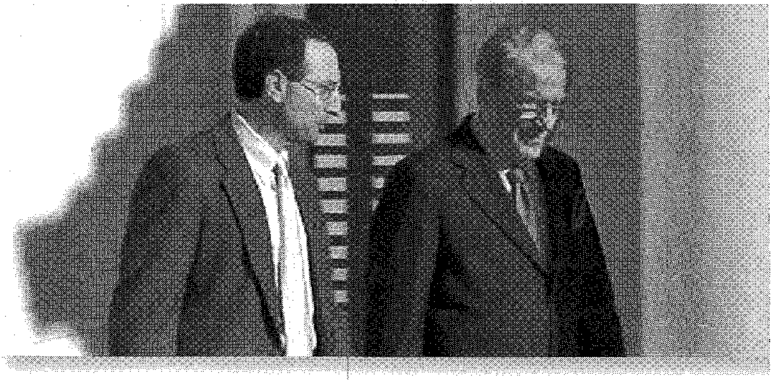

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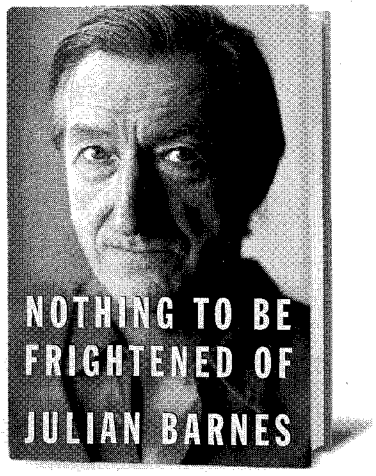

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—Sean Kinch, *The Tennessean*

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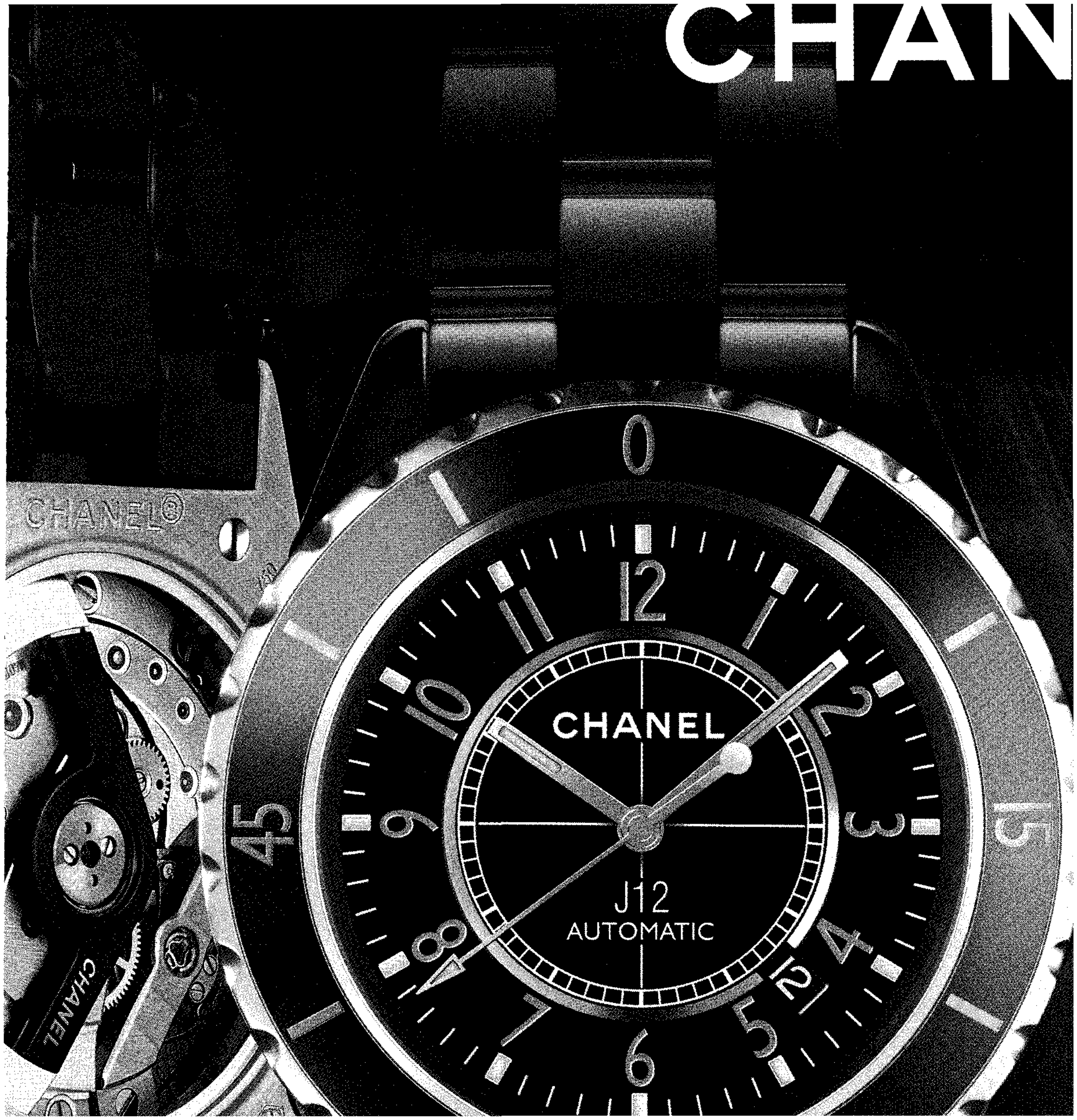
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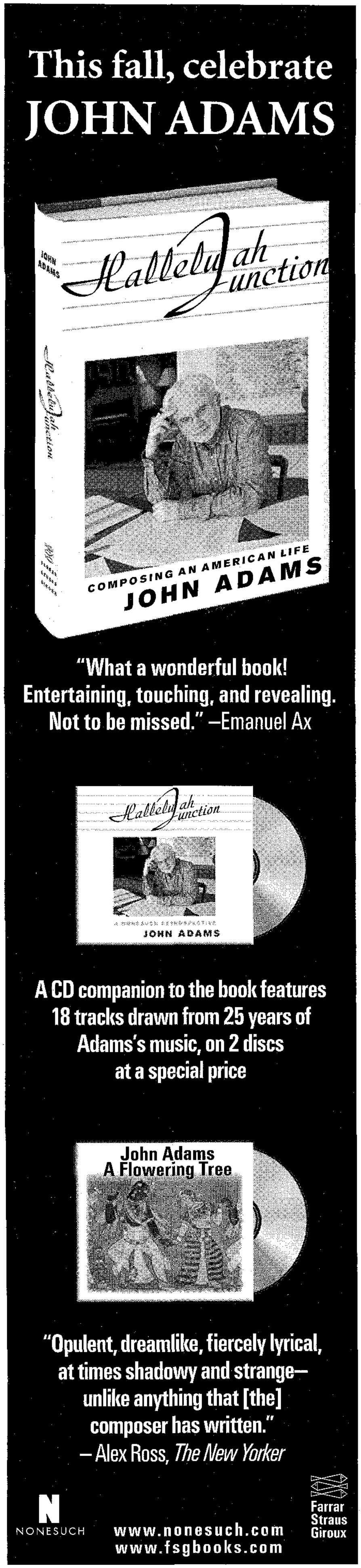

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# CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Mayer ("The Insiders," p. 38), a staff writer, won the John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism. Her book "The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned Into a War on American Ideals" has been nominated for a National Book Award.

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 31) is the president of the New America Foundation. He is the author of three books, including "Ghost Wars," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize, and "The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century."

Jeffrey Toobin (The Talk of the Town, p. 34) won the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," which is now available in paperback.

David Sedaris (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 43) is the author of "When You Are Engulfed in Flames," a book of essays.

Raffi Khatchadourian ("The Third Man," p. 45) is a staff writer.

Gerald Stern (Poem, p. 52) received the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets in 2005. His latest collection of poems, "Save the Last Dance," was published in May.

Jon Lee Anderson ("The Destroyer," p. 54) has published four books, including "The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan" and "The Fall of Baghdad."

Ruth Padel (Poem, p. 62) is a prize-winning poet and nonfiction writer. Her next poetry collection, "Darwin: A Life in Poems," will be published in the spring.

Claudia Roth Pierpont ("Method Man," p. 66) is the author of "Passionate Minds," a book of essays about women writers.

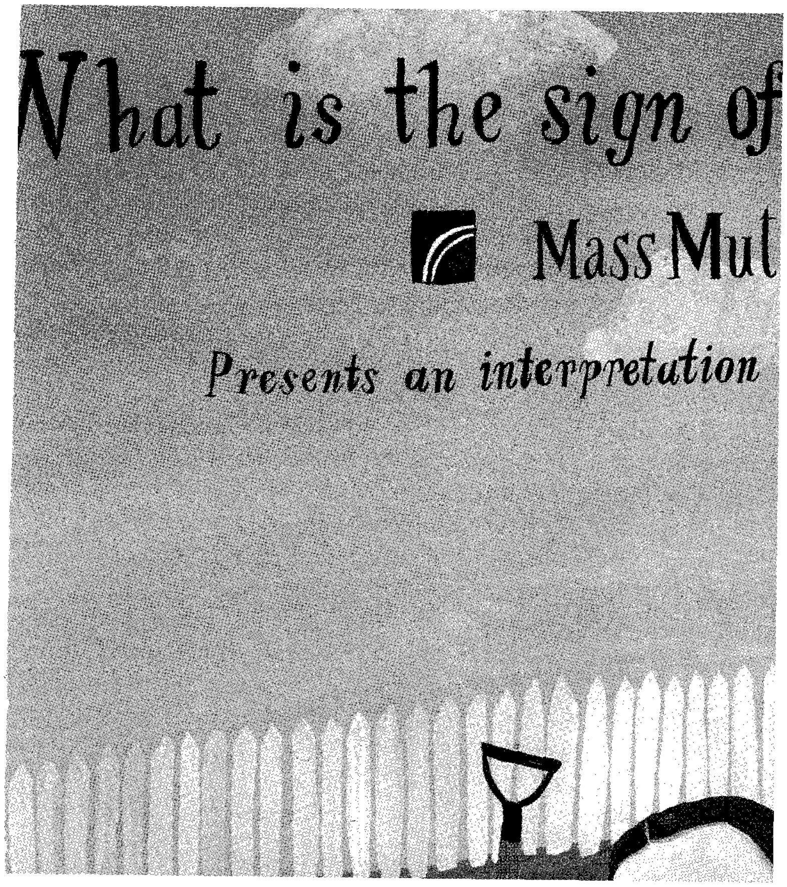
J. M. G. Le Clézio (Fiction, p. 74), a French writer, won this year's Nobel Prize in Literature. He is the author of more than forty books and has been translated into thirty-six languages.

Peter Schjeldahl (Books, p. 82) received this year's Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing. His book "Let's See: Writings on Art from *The New Yorker*" was published in May.

Richard McGuire (Cover) is a contributing director of the animated film, "Fear(s) of the Dark."

James Wood (Books, p. 88) is a staff writer and the author of "How Fiction Works," which came out in July.

**THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM**
The Balance Sheet, a new blog by *James Surowiecki*. / More blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* and *George Packer* on the election, *Steve Coll* on the financial crisis, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On. / Audio: *Ryan Lizza* and *Hendrik Hertzberg* on the Campaign Trail podcast. / *Kelefa Sanneh* and *David Denby* discuss political impersonation. / Samples from a "Doctor Atomic" performance. / Ask the Author: *Jane Mayer* takes questions about Sarah Palin. / From the archives: Complete campaign coverage. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest, now with a browsable archive.


What is the sign of
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# THE MAIL

## ELECTION DAY

While I agree with your editorial support for Barack Obama, the challenges of national leadership are greater than simply choosing the right candidate (Comment, October 13th). Our preoccupations—consumer profligacy, national myths, and denial of the rest of the world—may not result in the best choice of leadership, as the second Bush term so clearly demonstrates. The question is whether we can make the personal sacrifices necessary to change ourselves, or whether we believe that change is only about what leadership we select. The original patriots risked their lives for what they believed. No one is asking that of us; just that we vote with care and with attention to our enduring values, and realize that there is more to being good citizens than going to the polls.
*Jon Gilmore*
*South Orleans, Mass.*

The dullness of the debates, the ruinous state of the economy, and the downward spiral of the United States as a global leader had come close to cementing my cynicism in this election season. I had already started looking for a towel to toss. Your pragmatic endorsement of Obama has convinced me not to throw in the towel but, rather, to take it, wipe the cynicism away, and start waving it, not in surrender but in anticipation of a return to a common good.
*Vince Vawter*
*Louisville, Tenn.*

In endorsing Obama, the editors suggest that his election "could not help but say something encouraging, even exhilarating, about the country, about its dedication to tolerance and inclusiveness." As a seventy-four-year-old African-American who was involved in the civil-rights protests in the nineteen-sixties, I, too, have drawn a connection between Obama and the journey that the United States has made in its attitudes and actions with regard to race. I remember watching as black people went to the town hall to register to vote carrying American flags; the local police jerked the flags from their hands and turned them away. My parents told us of how German soldiers detained in Arkansas were served in white-only restaurants while black soldiers in uniform were forced to go to the backs of those restaurants to get food from take-out windows. Many civil-rights workers, black and white, died attempting to push the U.S. to live "the values it proclaims in its textbooks." The election of Barack Obama will not mean that struggles about race will be no more, nor will it erase the painful memories of my generation. But it will be a clear sign that my four-year-old granddaughter will grow up in a nation quite different from the nation that existed when I was her age. And, because of that, every American has reason to rejoice.
*Gilbert H. Caldwell*
*Asbury Park, N.J.*

## LETTERS FROM NORMAN

Norman Mailer was indeed a giant in twentieth-century American literature and thought, as his letters vividly demonstrate ("In the Ring," October 6th). It is because of Mailer's importance to our culture that the Harry Ransom Center, at the University of Texas at Austin, acquired his archive, in 2005. The letters you published, as well as the rest of Mailer's archive (more than a thousand boxes), have been catalogued and are available for research at the Ransom Center.
*Thomas F. Staley*
*Director, Harry Ransom Center*
*University of Texas at Austin*
*Austin, Texas*

EDITORS' NOTE: The photograph of Norman Mailer that appears on page 50 of the October 6th issue is by Diane Arbus (copyright © 1963 The Estate of Diane Arbus, L.L.C.).

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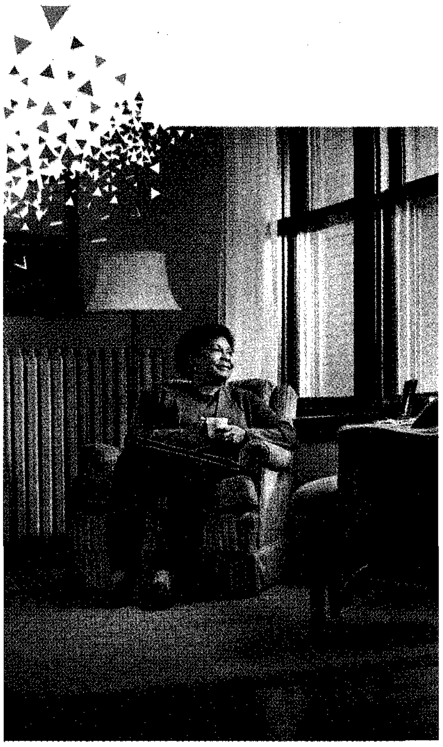
*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.*



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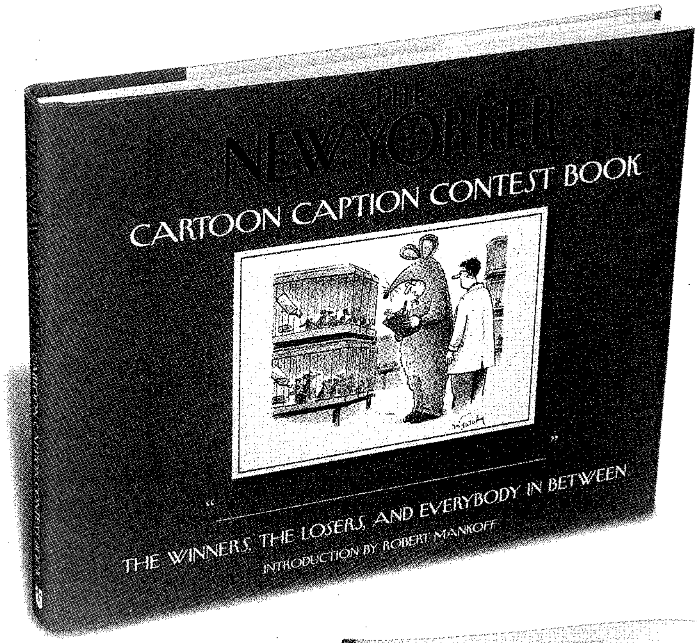
THE NEW YORKER
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST BOOK
"THE WINNERS, THE LOSERS, AND EVERYBODY IN BETWEEN"
INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT MANKOFF

## THE
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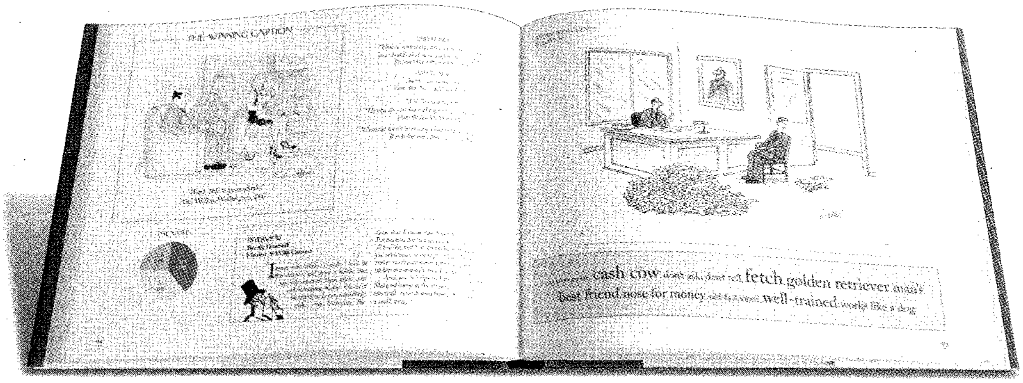
## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST BOOK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*The Swedish pop singer Lykke Li. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.*

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

| S | M | T | W | T | F | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |

## THIS WEEK

### NIGHT LIFE
### LOUVIN LIFE

The octogenarian country legend Charlie Louvin, who was the baritone half of the Louvin Brothers in the forties and fifties, is in the midst of a major comeback. Last year, he released his first album in more than a decade, a self-titled CD that garnered a great deal of attention and picked up a Grammy nomination. He has a pair of new albums and two shows here this week, at Banjo Jim's and at the 92nd Street Y's new Tribeca space. (See page 14.)

### ART
### WHAT'S IN A NAME

Outside the entrance to the Guggenheim Museum, an illuminated movie marquee by Philippe Parreno kicks off "theanyspacewhatever," a show of new works by ten international artists. In the rotunda, a revolving hotel room designed by Carsten Höller will accommodate occasional overnight guests. (See page 16.)

### DANCE
### REPETITIVE EMOTION

The Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and her ensemble, Rosas, return to BAM, with a program featuring several elegant pieces set to the music of Steve Reich, a long-standing interest of hers. (See page 20.)

### CLASSICAL MUSIC
### POLE POSITION

The Polish contralto Ewa Podleś, who just sang at the Met in "La Gioconda," possesses a voice of phenomenal power and richness. She sings music by Respighi and Haydn in one of two programs offered this week by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. (See page 22.)

### MOVIES
### REAL IN ISRAEL

The Israeli director Amos Gitai often weaves documentary elements into his fictional films, including the upcoming "One Day You'll Understand," which opens at the end of the month. MOMA offers a retrospective of his purely documentary films, including "News from Home/News from House," from 2006, about several generations of inhabitants of a building in West Jerusalem. (See page 27.)

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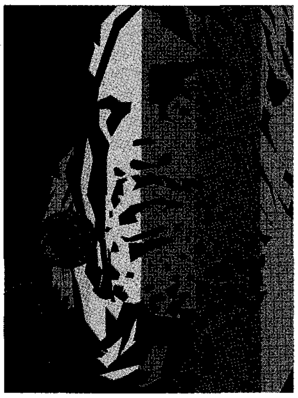
## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## ODD TODD

The folksinger and songwriter Todd Snider has gone on record as being interested in the comic possibilities of pop music. Several records, in fact. One of his earliest hits was the mordant "Talkin' Seattle Grunge Rock Blues," back in 1994, and his two most recent albums, "East Nashville Skyline" and "The Devil You Know," have included portraits of Mike Tyson and George W. Bush that are pointed but not without pathos. Snider's shambling faux-stoner style is on full display on a new mini-album, "Peace Queer," whose leadoff track, "Mission Accomplished (Because You Gotta Have Faith)," weaves together George Michael, Will Rogers, and the war in Iraq. ("Peace Queer" is available for free download from Snider's Web site for the rest of October.) As comically surefooted as Snider is on his recordings, even he can't compete with his stage persona, where he digresses between songs, sometimes at great length, always with great humor. Snider appears Oct. 25 as part of a live version of NPR's "Mountain Stage," at Town Hall.

—*Ben Greenman*



KIM DEMARCO

## THE THEATRE
## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.*

**BARN SERIES**
LAByrinth Theatre Company's annual festival of free staged readings includes new works by Cusi Cram and Stephen Adly Guirgis. Opens Oct. 23. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

**BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL**
Stephen Daldry directs the musical based on the movie, about a working-class boy who discovers a love for ballet. Elton John wrote the music, and Lee Hall wrote the book and lyrics. In previews. (Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**CAPTURE NOW**
Larry Moss directs the world première of a play by Josh Jonas, about the relationship between a teen-ager and his four-year-old brother. Opens Oct. 22. (The Theatres at 45 Bleecker Street, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

**DIVIDING THE ESTATE**
Horton Foote's comedy about a Texas family gets transferred after a run in 2006 at Primary Stages. Elizabeth Ashley, Arthur French, Hallie Foote, Penny Fuller, and Gerald McRaney star. Michael Wilson directs. Previews begin Oct. 23. (Lincoln Center Theatre, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

**FARRAGUT NORTH**
At Atlantic Theatre Company, Doug Hughes directs the world première of Beau Willimon's new drama, about a young press secretary for an aspiring Presidential candidate. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

**THE GRAND INQUISITOR**
At New York Theatre Workshop, Peter Brooks directs this C.I.C.T./Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord production, co-presented by Theatre for a New Audience, an adaptation by Marie-Hélène Estienne of the Inquisitor section of "The Brothers Karamazov." In previews. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

**IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING**
Mike Daisey presents a monologue about the Department of Homeland Security. Jean-Michele Gregory directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 27. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

**THE LANGUAGE OF TREES**
The world première of a play by Steven Levenson, about an American translator who goes to a war zone in the Middle East, leaving his wife and son in the hands of a friendly neighbor. Alex Timbers directs. In previews. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

**LOVE CHILD**
Primary Stages presents a comedy written and performed by Daniel Jenkins and Robert Stanton, about the opening night of a play whose audience is so affected by the work that they feel moved to respond to the actors during the performance. In previews. Opens Oct. 26. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

**MADE IN POLAND**
The Polish Cultural Institute presents a festival of contemporary Polish plays. Opens Oct. 22. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

**THE MASTER BUILDER**
The world première of the Tony-winning playwright Frank McGuinness's adaptation of Ibsen's play from 1892, about a brilliant architect who makes empty promises to a young girl. Ciarán O'Reilly directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 23. (Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

**MOUTH TO MOUTH**
The New Group opens its season with the U.S. première of a new play by Kevin Elyot, about a gay writer living with AIDS and his friend, a woman who is very attached to her teen-age son. Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**THE OEDIPUS CYCLE**
Shepard Sobel directs the world première of Peter Constantine's translation of the Sophocles plays. In previews. Opens Oct. 27. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

**PETER PAN**
Irondale Ensemble Project inaugurates its new Off-Broadway theatre in Brooklyn, with a revival of J. M. Barrie's classic play, directed by Jim Niesen. Opens Oct. 22. (85 S. Oxford St. 212-352-3101.)

**ROAD SHOW**
John Doyle directs the New York première of a musical by Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics) and John Weidman (book), about brothers who start out in the Alaska gold rush and end up participating in the Florida real-estate boom of the thirties. Michael Cerveris and Alexander Gemignani star. Previews begin Oct. 28. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

**ROMANTIC POETRY**
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new musical by John Patrick Shanley ("Moonstruck," "Doubt") and Henry Krieger ("Dreamgirls"), a romance set in Manhattan and its suburbs. In previews. Opens Oct. 28. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**SATURN RETURNS**
Noah Haidle wrote this play, in which a radiologist (played by three different actors) confronts three women at various stages of his life. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

**SPEED-THE-PLOW**
Raúl Esparza, Elisabeth Moss, and Jeremy Piven star in David Mamet's play about the dark side of the film industry. Neil Pepe directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 23. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

**STREAMERS**
Roundabout Theatre Company presents David Rabe's drama from 1976, set in 1965, about four soldiers in boot camp in Virginia, waiting to be deployed to Vietnam. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

## NOW PLAYING

**ALIENS WITH EXTRAORDINARY SKILLS**
Nadia (Natalia Payne) and Borat (Seth Fisher) are two young Russian clowns—O.K., one is from Moldova—working in the U.S. on phony visas. They make their separate ways to New York City, where their overlapping searches for the American dream bring them into contact with an exotic dancer (Jessica Pimentel) and a failed rock and roller (Kevin Isola). Saviana Stanescu's play, directed by Tea Alagic for the Women's Project, has affecting moments of tenderness and humor, but it's a flawed narrative, shifting uneasily among realistic, symbolic, and melodramatic styles. What carries the evening are the unfailingly first-rate performances of the four leads. (424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200. Through Oct. 26.)

**ALL MY SONS**
Simon McBurney directs Arthur Miller's play from 1947. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**BLACK WATCH**
The National Theatre of Scotland returns to St. Ann's Warehouse with Gregory Burke's play. (38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

**BLASTED**
The forceful and always daring SoHo Rep mounts the long-awaited New York première of the late Sarah Kane's groundbreaking and excruciating drama, in which the attempts of an aging journalist (Reed Birney) to seduce a dim-witted young girl (Marin Ireland) quickly spiral into an increasingly nightmarish series of events. Written when the playwright was only twenty-three years old, the play is a sharp treatise on sex, politics, media, and violence that is two parts Beckett and one part gory fever dream. The director, Sarah Benson, has assembled a top-notch team of designers and a cast of equally brilliant actors, and together they bring this ambitious work to thrilling life with admirable precision. The results are no less than simultaneously devastating and sublime. (46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.)

**FIFTY WORDS**
Michael Weller's play (well directed by Austin Pendleton) turns an ordinary marital quarrel into

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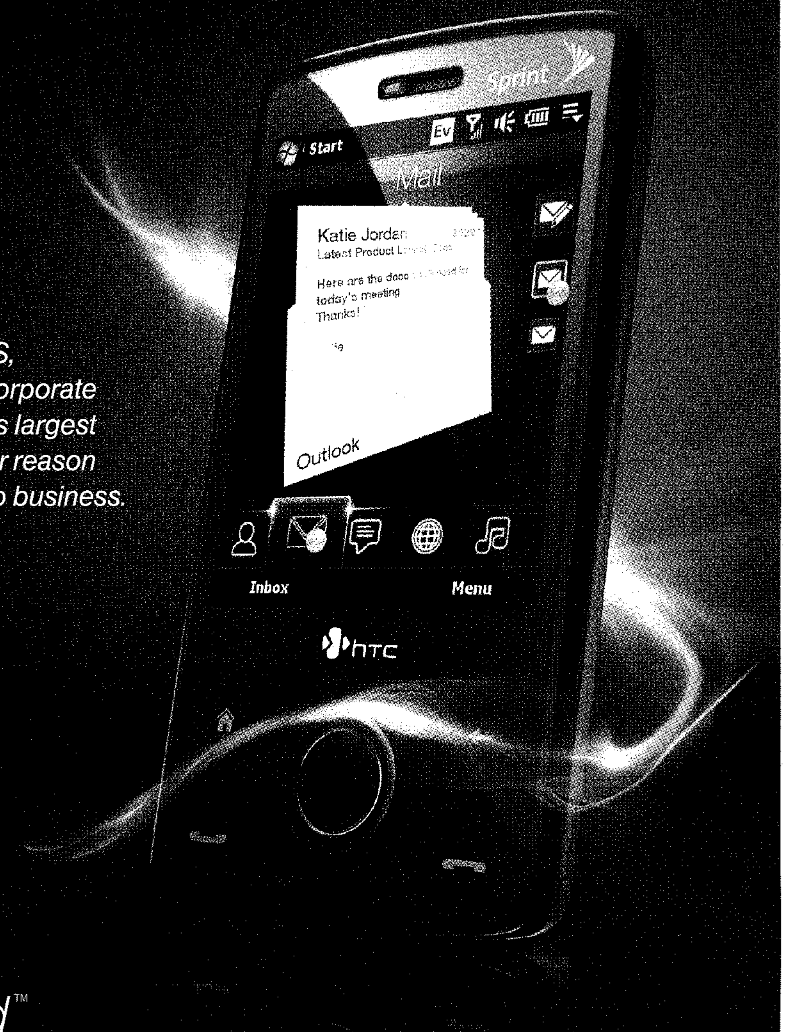

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an extraordinary debacle. For ninety minutes, Adam (Norbert Leo Butz) and Jan (Elizabeth Marvel) go at it in their designer kitchen, while their troubled nine-year-old son, Greg, is away on his first overnight trip. The obbligato of recrimination is played with fierce, eye-popping authority by both actors. If the play reaches a conclusion about anything, it is that the greatest show on earth is the show of emotion. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/20/08.) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

**KINDNESS**

Adam Rapp's new play, at Playwrights Horizons, is a portrait of reluctant tenderness between a mother and son, laced with uncomfortable menace. Maryanne (Annette O'Toole), hobbled by cancer and chemo, has brought Dennis (Christopher Denham), seventeen, to New York from Indiana to see a beloved Broadway musical about tragic bohemians—"Survivin' "—that has captured her imagination. But Dennis doesn't want to go, opting to stay in their midtown hotel room, and Maryanne invites a kindly cabdriver along instead. Meanwhile, a mysterious beauty (Katherine Waterston) sneaks into Dennis's room, looking for a place to hide out; soon, she and Dennis are drinking whiskey and fantasizing about matricide. Though the blend of naturalism and contrivance doesn't create a coherent whole, Rapp's fine writing and the affecting performances make up for it. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS**

Robert Bolt's 1960 hit (under the direction of Doug Hughes) focusses on the legalistic tightrope that Sir Thomas More (Frank Langella) walks between his King and his God, when Henry VIII (Patrick Page) decides to wage war on the Pope and declare himself the Supreme Head of the Church in England. As More, Langella lets virtuosity substitute for humanity. Whether he's inspecting a silver goblet, holding his cuffs to slip into his robe, or fiddling with his fingers as he reads a book, Langella's decorative filigrees of gesture telegraph vanity, not spirituality, making him, more precisely, a ham for all seasons. (10/20/08) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

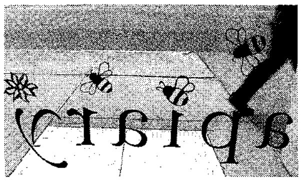
**TO BE OR NOT TO BE**

In Warsaw in 1939, a ragtag theatre troupe—led by a scenery-chewing Shakespearean actor (David Rasche) and his wife (Jan Maxwell), who has a penchant for bomber pilots—gets caught up in a Nazi spy game and must use a series of fake mustaches to outwit the Gestapo. Nick Whitby's adaptation of Ernst Lubitsch's 1942 film turns what was once political satire into mild-mannered period farce: a "Springtime for Hitler" without the sting. Manhattan Theatre Club's production is cleanly staged by Casey Nicholaw (the scene changes are first-rate), but the comedic pitch levels off just when it should be gaining altitude. To its credit, the play will leave you in a perfectly good mood about Occupied Poland. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

## *Also Playing*

**ABSINTHE:** Spiegeltent, South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **ENTER LAUGHING:** St. Peter's Theatre, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820. Through Oct. 26. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE GLASS CAGE:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IN CONFLICT:** Culture Project, 27 Barrow St. 212-315-0231. **IRENA'S VOW:** Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101. **THE SEAGULL:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

# TABLES FOR TWO
## APIARY



60 Third Ave. (212-254-0888)—In the East Village, a neighborhood known for its all-you-can-eat sushi and alarming preponderance of Irish sports bars, post-collegiate insouciance permeates the dining scene. Even the area's more ambitious restaurants, which are invariably of the David Chang variety, adopt a resolute informality: bar stools, communal tables, open kitchens. Apiary affects no such fratty precociousness. Dimly lit and darkly appointed, it is the sort of place grownups from Gramercy might go if they venture too far down Third Avenue. And if grownups are generally understood to be people who have not filled their entire apartments with IKEA, Apiary is all the more apropos, because it is a restaurant that is really a furniture showcase. A franchise of Ligne Roset, the high-end French design house, created and owns the establishment, and the space is a study in a particularly Gallic strain of self-conscious sophistication. Instead of chandeliers, cylindrical silver ceiling fixtures are adorned with chandelier-shaped cutouts. Sleek, squat chairs are upholstered in deep wine-colored reds and purples. On the back wall, sprawled over a floor-to-ceiling mirror, is a gnarly-limbed "Day of the Triffids"-like lighting installation. (It's called "Paranoid.")

Meanwhile, Apiary's menu covers some of the same ground as a Presidential debate—the American kitchen table with detours to the Middle East—with about as much resolution. The chef, Neil Manacle, worked for many years under Bobby Flay, who has publicly declared his aversion to lentils. The grill master's apprentice displays a similar inclination for heft. A juicy Hudson Valley rabbit loin was treated with uncommon care: braised in a rich red-wine stock, swaddled in a thin slice of Serrano ham, then placed on a bed of pillowy pan-fried spaetzle. But other dishes were less convincing, including much of the Middle Eastern-influenced fare (fried hummus, apricot-and-mint-strewn couscous, calamari served with smoky relishes). A Moroccan spiced chicken had been rubbed with a host of seasonings—among them, cumin, coriander, paprika, and turmeric—but the only discernible flavor on the plate was cinnamon. There was a similarly cloying sweetness to the pork tenderloin, which arrived stranded in a sticky mustard-fig glaze. On the side were haricots verts dressed with shards of roasted hazelnuts, which brought to mind a Christmas cake. It didn't help to be drinking one of the three signature sangrias—another culturally confused non sequitur, and further proof, if it were needed, that furniture companies aren't meant to open restaurants. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $21-$28.)

—*Amelia Lester*

# NIGHT LIFE
## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.*

**BANJO JIM'S**

9th St. at Avenue C (212-777-0869)—Oct. 24: **Charlie Louvin**, the baritone half of the Louvin Brothers—one of country music's most influential and revered vocal-harmony duos—began making records in the late forties with his brother, Ira. The act split up in 1963, and Ira was killed in a car crash two years later. Charlie's output may have slowed over the years, but interest in the Louvin Brothers has only grown, at least in certain circles: Gram Parsons once reportedly paid people to search L.A. music shops for their out-of-print records. Last year, Charlie released a self-titled album, his first in more than a decade, and it received a Grammy nomination. He's been back in the studio, and has two new records. "Steps to Heaven," on which he's accompanied, for the most part, by only a piano and a gospel choir, is out now; "Charlie Louvin Sings Murder Ballads & Disaster Songs" comes out in December.

**B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL**

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 26: **Jefferson Starship**, which is piloted by the guitarist, sci-fi buff, and Jefferson Airplane founder Paul Kantner, has a new album, "Jefferson's Tree of Liberty," a reworking of old folk songs.

**BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY**

127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 24: The eccentric reggae legend and innovative producer **Lee (Scratch) Perry**, who has worked with everyone from Bob Marley to the Clash, is legendary for his bizarre behavior (he once, reportedly, burned down his own studio, Black Ark, in Jamaica). Tireless and prolific, Perry releases albums at a dizzying pace. His latest is the eclectic collection "Scratch Came, Scratch Saw, Scratch Conquered." Oct. 26: The poodle-haired guitarist **Yngwie Malmsteen** may have become somewhat of a cartoon character in recent years, but his fleet-fingered, classical style of heavy metal remains impressive. Twenty-four years after dropping his influential début instrumental album, "Rising Force," Malmsteen is back with a shred-heavy effort called "Perpetual Flame." Oct. 28: The eighties hair-metal vets **Tesla** soldier on, playing bluesy hard rock.

**CMJ MUSIC MARATHON**

The annual festival of meeting, greeting, and grabbing at the next big thing brings together countless bands from every conceivable genre. If there's a show listed in this section during the festival's dates (Oct. 21-25), you can bet what's left of your 401(k) that it's part of the gathering. (For more information, visit www.cmj.com.)

**FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA**

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 23: **Another Black Day, Bury Your Dead, Five Finger Death Punch**, and **In This Moment** demonstrate the latest in teen angst.

**GRAND BALLROOM**

Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 25: Pairing the folk-troubadour style with gruff urgency of punk, **Billy Bragg** first appeared in the early eighties as an earnest singer-songwriter with a strident socialist agenda. While age has significantly mellowed both him and his music, Bragg's thoughtful ruminations on relationships and social injustices remain stirring.

**HIGHLINE BALLROOM**

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Oct. 25: A blues musician at heart, the powerfully direct, melisma-free **Joan Osborne** has sung with the Dead, the Dixie Chicks, and Motown's Funk Brothers. She's even survived a smash hit, 1995's "One of Us." Her latest album, "Little Wild One," is an homage to New York City.

**MADISON SQUARE GARDEN**

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 27: Emboldened by the constant parade of reunion tours, the eighties boy band **New Kids**

HONORE BROWN

on the Block announced their re-formation, to much fanfare, earlier this year. They have a new album (the mature-sounding "The Block"), but whether they can still do the fabled New Kids Dance remains to be seen.

**92Y TRIBECA**
200 Hudson St., at Canal St. (212-601-1000)—Oct. 23: **Charlie Louvin** (see Banjo Jim's) helps inaugurate this new downtown outpost of the 92nd Street Y.

**NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE**
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 24: The Jersey rocker **Southside Johnny** recently recorded a dozen Tom Waits songs backed by a big band and released the album "Grapefruit Moon." Oct. 25: The Mississippi rapper, producer, and actor **David Banner.**

**ROSELAND**
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 28: A state-of-the-art hip-hop show, with the near-legendary live band the **Roots,** the clever fellows in **Gym Class Heroes** (who have had the courage and audacity to embrace both Supertramp and Hall & Oates in their work), and **Estelle,** the sterling R. & B. vocalist from England who currently has a hit with her song "American Boy," featuring Kanye West.

**SOUTHPAW**
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope (718-230-0236)—Oct. 25: **Laika & The Cosmonauts,** surf rockers from Finland, join forces with **Los Straitjackets,** surf rockers from Nashville who wear Mexican-wrestling masks.

**TERMINAL 5**
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Oct. 22-25: **Coheed and Cambria** somehow forges a successful marriage of progressive-rock filigree and punk-rock intensity. The ambitious quartet has a flair for needlessly complicated song titles, inventive arrangements, and high-pitched vocals.

**TOWN HALL**
123 W. 43rd St. (212-307-4100)—"Mountain Stage with Larry Groce"—the live-music radio show produced by West Virginia Public Broadcasting and heard around the country on NPR—has been showcasing established and emerging country, roots, blues, and rock musicians for nearly a quarter century. (Sarah McLachlan, Sheryl Crow, and the Barenaked Ladies are but a handful of artists who were given national exposure on the program early in their careers.) Though usually recorded live in Charleston, it hits the road on occasion, and will touch down here on Oct. 25. The bill features the Canadian singer-songwriter and environmental activist **Bruce Cockburn, Rodney Crowell** (who just released "Sex & Gasoline," a fine bookend to his 1988 breakthrough album, "Diamonds & Dirt"), **Rosanne Cash,** and **Todd Snider.** (For more information, see www.mountainstage.org.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**BIRDLAND**
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 21-25: **Jane Monheit.** Although the blizzard of hype that heralded her entry on the scene has abated, Monheit remains what she has been all along—a pleasant enough singer with jazz leanings.

**BLUE NOTE**
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 21-26: **The Dizzy Gillespie Alumni All-Stars** feature one of the late trumpeter's more significant cohorts, the veteran saxophonist and flutist **James Moody,** who first played with Gillespie in 1946.

**DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA**
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 22-26: **Bobby Hutcherson,** a modernist master of the vibraphone, leads a quartet that includes **Russell Malone,** on guitar, **Renee Rosnes,** on piano, and **Victor Lewis,** on drums.

**FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY**
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Oct. 21-25: **Lynda Carter,** television's onetime Wonder Woman, directs much of her strength these days to her agreeable cabaret act.

**IRIDIUM**
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 23: The trumpeter **John McNeil** and the saxophonist **Bill McHenry** have spent the past few years recasting many under-appreciated hard-bop and cool-jazz songs by way of a more open-ended improvisational format. The bracing results can be heard on their latest album, "Rediscovery." Oct. 24-26: The razzle-dazzle trumpeter and keyboardist **Arturo Sandoval.**

**JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER**
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Oct. 23-25: A "Big Band Bash" featuring Los Angeles's **Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra** and New York's own **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.**

**JAZZ STANDARD**
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 24-26: Undiluted bop courtesy of the alto saxophonist **Charles McPherson,** who will be joined, as usual on his New York visits, by the trumpeter **Tom Harrell.**

**SMALLS**
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Oct. 23: The swing and stride pianist **Ehud Asherie** performs duets with the trumpeter **Jon-Erik Kellso.** Later that night, Asherie is joined by a bassist and a drummer to showcase his new trio album, "Swing Set."

**THE STONE**
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Oct. 23: Accomplished yet raw-feeling experimental chamber-folk from the Brooklyn-based collaborative duo

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of **Mary Halvorson,** on guitar and vocals, and **Jessica Pavone,** on viola and vocals. Oct. 24: A duo with **Billy Martin** (of Medeski Martin & Wood), on percussion, and the Beijing-born **Wu Fei,** on *guzheng* (a traditional Chinese zither), followed by a set with **DJ Olive** on turntables. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

**SYMPHONY SPACE**
Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Oct. 24: Artists including **Anthony Braxton, John Zorn, Karl Berger,** and **Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra** pay tribute to the Creative Music Studio, the Woodstock-based free-jazz and world-music institution.

**VILLAGE VANGUARD**
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 21-26: An emblematic member of a generation itching to grab inspiration from disparate sources, **Anat Cohen** blends Israeli and Latin music, classic R. & B., and mainstream jazz into her post-bop vision, as heard on her new album, "Notes from the Village." She's a fine saxophonist, but the clarinet is the instrument she excels on. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

**WORLD FINANCIAL CENTER**
Winter Garden, World Financial Center, Battery Park City—Oct. 28: The drummer and composer **Bobby Previte** presents his multi-cycled piece "The 23 Constellations of Joan Miró," which, in its original recorded form, was one of the most acclaimed albums of 2003. (For more information, visit www.worldfinancialcenter.com.)

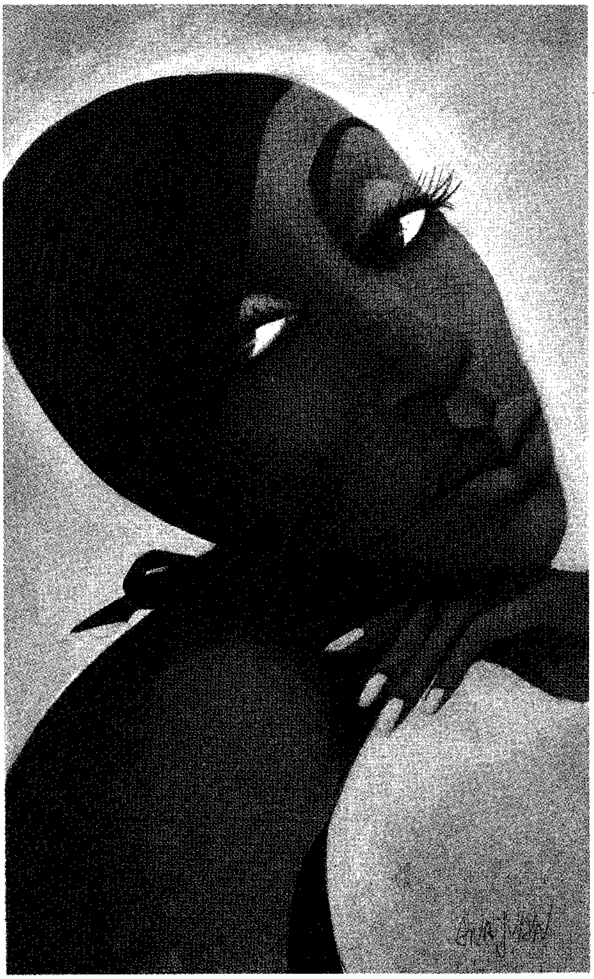
## ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Opens Oct. 24. ♦ **"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Royal Porcelain from the Twinight Collection: 1800-1850."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Rhythms of Modern Life: British Prints, 1914-1939."** Through Dec. 7. ♦ **"New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End."** Made to command an interior wall or to flow on a body in movement, Africa's dynamic textiles feed the eye from a distance but are just as exciting viewed at close range. This show juxtaposes nineteenth-century wraps and presentation cloths with works by contemporary artists influenced by these traditions. The earliest known tie-dye in a Western collection—a starburst indigo print from Gambia—harmonizes with the photographs of tribal aristocrats and Bamako hipsters by the Malian portraitists Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé. A dazzling kente cloth from Ghana is paired with—and trumps—an installation of recent fabric-based paintings by Yinka Shonibare. Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Through Jan. 5. **"Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie."** Through Dec. 1. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Theanyspacewhatever."** New works by ten contemporary artists—including Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, and Pierre Huyghe—whose work crosses over into architecture, design, cinema, theatre, and, in the case of Philippe Parreno, acoustic museum guides. Opens Oct. 24. ♦ **"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)


*The captivating English vocalist Estelle, at Roseland.*

**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Climate Change."** Through Aug. 16. **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

**AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM**
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips / Mark Rothko, Compositions in Pink, Green, and Red."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Martin Ramirez: The Last Works."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

**ASIA SOCIETY**
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Art and China's Revolution."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Writing the Word of God: Calligraphy and the Qur'an."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

**BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS**
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**FRICK COLLECTION**
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze."** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

**INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY**
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Susan Meiselas: In History."** The photojournalist has dedicated four decades to documenting war-torn regions of the world and the suffering of the dispossessed. The color images in the series "Nicaragua" (begun in 1978) and "Kurdistan" (begun in 1991) can be particularly hard to look at, whether they depict a body charred beyond recognition or a pile of unearthed clothing. Such pictures raise a question: what does it mean when photographers witness atrocities against other human beings and take no action to stop them? It's a dilemma that troubles Meiselas, as an interview published in the show's handsome catalogue makes clear. The black-and-white prints from Meiselas's early project "Carnival Strippers" (1972-75), taken during four summers in small towns on the Eastern Seaboard, are less graphic than her subsequent work, but just as full of pathos—and just as morally complex. Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

**MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM**
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters."** Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN**
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**"Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Elegant Armor: The Art of Jewelry."** Through May 31. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—In Paris, the wildly successful 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes popularized Art Deco and the International Style, and influenced American architecture, fashion, and decorative arts. French designers were similarly agog for jazz, skyscrapers, and other innovations showcased in the New York World's Fair of 1939. Using these expositions as bookends, **"Paris/New York: Design Fashion Culture 1925-1940"** chronicles the reciprocal influences through photographs, posters, furniture, textiles, and the luscious knockoffs of Parisian couture manufactured for Manhattan department stores. A composite image from 1934 wedges the cruise ship Normandie—touted as "France afloat"—into Times Square. A black-and-white film clip, circa 1925, shows Josephine Baker shaking her hips in a skirt made of bananas. Ensembles by Mainbocher and Hattie Carnegie are more modest but equally stylish. Through Feb. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

**NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"George Tooker: A Retrospective."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Unknown Blakelock."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**NEUE GALERIE**
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Alfred Kubin: Drawings, 1897-1909."** Through Jan. 26. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

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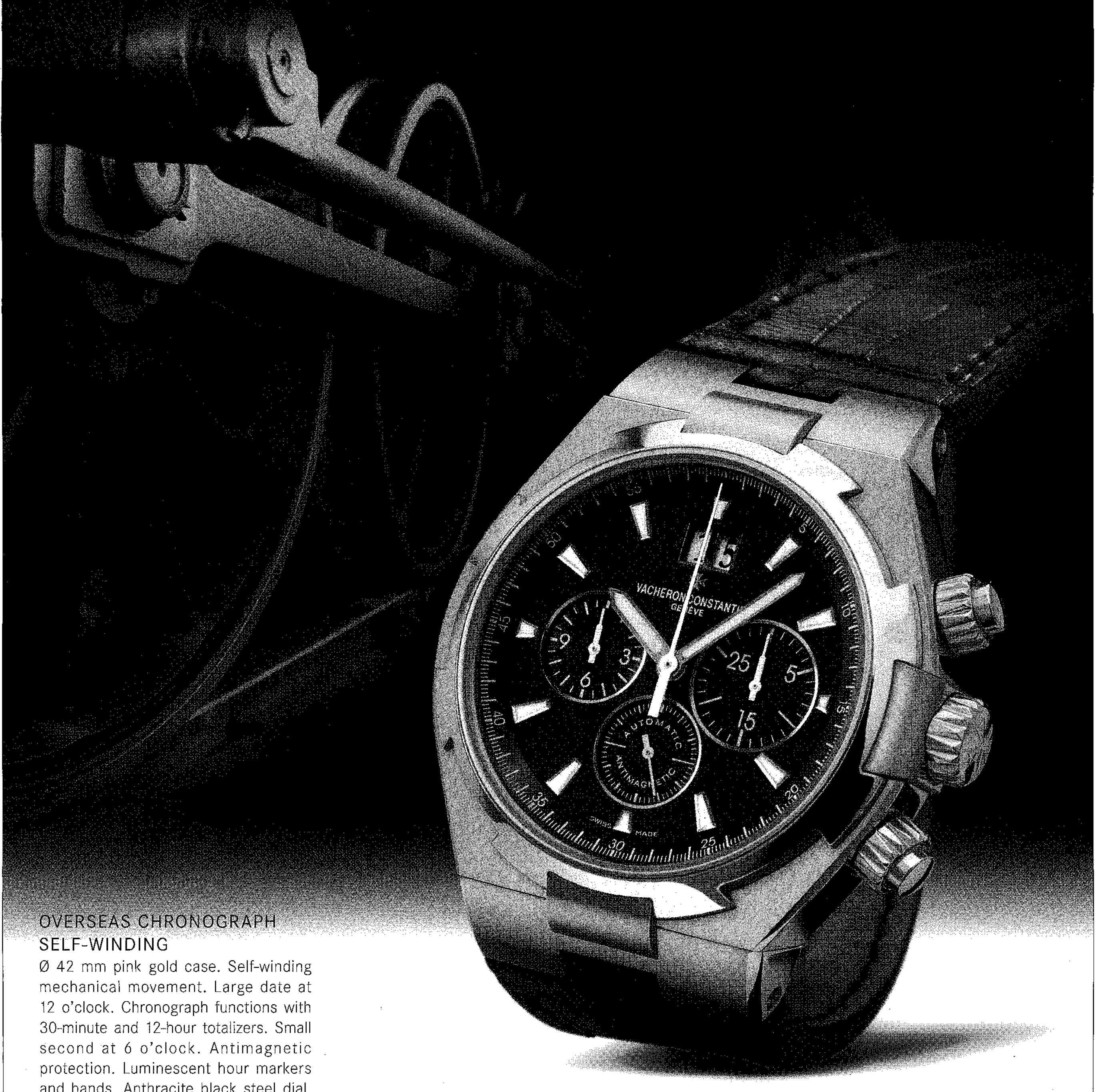

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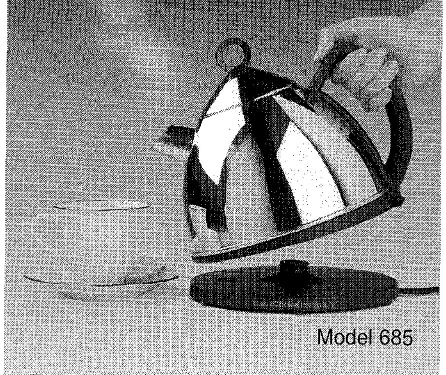

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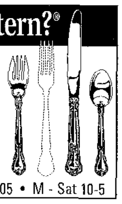

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**NEW MUSEUM**
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Museum as Hub: Six Degrees."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

**NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Drawn by New York: Six Centuries of Watercolors and Drawings."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Grant and Lee in War and Peace."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER**
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Neohoodoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool."** Through April 13. ♦ **"Yael Bartana."** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

**STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM**
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kehinde Wiley—The World Stage: Africa, Lagos~Dakar."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"New Intuitions."** The three artists in the museum's 2007-08 Artist-in-Residence program all play with fetish and fantasy in sculptural assemblage and installation. Leslie Hewitt warms up her cool brand of neo-Conceptualism with nostalgia, evidenced by a photocollage of blue shag carpeting and seventies-looking snapshots. Saya Woolfalk takes a maximalist approach, populating a walk-in wonderland with phallic stuffed-fabric growths and kooky costumes, which appear in a videotaped performance. Tanea Richardson also sews, pulling together bulky, droopy, implicitly bodily constructions of fake fur, bungee cords, and twine that gape from open frames or hang, as if in bondage, from the ceiling. In addition to wit and skill, the artists share a sense of art history as both a delightful candy store and an embarrassing family secret. Through Oct. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

**LIZA LOU**
Painstaking labor and intricate craft are familiar hallmarks of Lou's work, but political intimations are new—and they're not as successful. For the past three years, the American artist has been working in South Africa, and overblown sculptures in which glass beads are glued to chain-link fences are, apparently, a comment on the corrupting power of luxury, as is a barricade encrusted with twenty-four-karat gold beads. In wall works, intended to evoke Muslim prayer rugs, beaded patterns ooze like blood or mold, turning traditional imagery sordid. Two beaded ropes, each a mile long, are coiled into cylinders. What they mean is anyone's guess, though their formal acuity impresses. Through Nov. 15. (L&M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020; Lever House, 390 Park Ave.)

**"MAKING IT REAL"**
This clever, instructive exhibition, subtitled "Photomontage Before Photoshop," gathers work from the past two centuries that subverts, spoofs, and otherwise flouts the notion of "straight" photography. Using darkroom techniques both sophisticated and crude, photographers conjured up obvious fantasies (two children astride an enormous fish), convincing constructs (a family gathering and a Cabinet meeting, both pieced together like collages), and everything in between. A haunted, dreamy quality links early spirit photographs and the surrealist experimentation of Rolf Tietgens, George Platt Lynes, and Pedro Guerrero. Herbert Matter, Gordon Coster, and a number of anonymous studio technicians lent their graphic genius to commercial and propaganda images that haven't lost their punch. Through Nov. 1. (De Lellis, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 212-327-1482.)

### *Short List*

**LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Nov. 20. **MARY HEILMANN:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Oct. 25. **ALEX KATZ:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through Nov. 26. **KEN PRICE:** Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St. 212-246-5360. Through Nov. 15. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Opens Oct. 23. **ADAM VAN DOREN:** Renaissance Studios, 130 W. 57th St. 212-586-8342. Through Dec. 6.

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

**DAG ALVENG**
In his first New York solo exhibition since 1993, Alveng shows exceptionally handsome new prints of photographs from a series he started in 1979 called "Summer Light." His subjects are the rural landscape (fields, forests, weathered rocks) and people out of doors (including the photographer himself, nude and falling into a lake). But what he captures is a mood—sunny, leisurely, contemplative—that suffuses the work with a subtle warmth. Several prints appear to have been bleached by the sun (a dirt path through the woods disappears into a blinding glow), but that only gives Alveng's rich gray tones the look of burnished platinum. Through Oct. 25. (Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883.)

**JEFF WHETSTONE**
Whetstone's photographs of the graffiti-covered interiors of saltpeter caves in Alabama and Tennessee are fascinating bits of time travel. The not-so-primitive markings here may only have been made in the past year, but some go back more than a century and a half. Chalk and florescent spray-paint tags—Johnny, Sweets, Carlos, Renegades—are layered over scratched slashes and deep incisions in the rocks. A smiley face and a smiling skull suggest that the history of cave painting could be updated, but Whetstone's blast of artificial light jolts us into the present, where centuries collapse and everything old is new again. Through Oct. 25. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

### *Short List*

**BETH CAMPBELL:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Opens Oct. 24. **NICOLE CHERUBINI:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Nov. 1. **JUDITH EISLER:** Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710. Through Nov. 15. **PHYLLIS GALEMBO:** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through Oct. 25. **GEORGE HERMS:** Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through Nov. 15. **SEAN LANDERS:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Nov. 8. **MATTHEW MONAHAN:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Nov. 15. **ERNESTO NETO:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Nov. 15. **LARI PITTMAN:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Nov. 29. **LISA SANDITZ:** CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766. Opens Oct. 23. **"SCULPTING TIME":** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through Nov. 1.

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

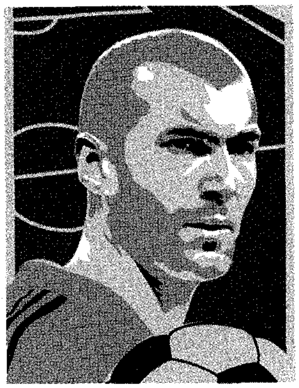
**GUIDO CASTAGNOLI**
This Italian photographer makes color pictures of a little-seen side of Japan: small towns that look like generic American suburbs. Castagnoli manipulates his work so the images appear slightly overexposed and reds turn the pinkish hue of vintage color prints, making Stephen Shore an obvious influence. In his views of shopping streets and individual stores, parked cars are the only indication of human presence and Japanese signage the only proof that we're not in Ohio or New Jersey. But the ghost-town emptiness isn't as striking as the sense of cultural homogenization, underlined by a surprising number of English-language signs. Through Nov. 1. (Wolf, 10 Leonard St. 212-925-0025.)

**"MATTERS OF SENSATION"**
Rendering software and digital fabrications come of age in "Matters of Sensation," a showcase for four-

## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
## GETTING HIS KICKS

In 2006, the Frenchman Zinédine Zidane, the most gifted—and certainly the most enigmatic—of recent soccer players, received a suitably unusual tribute. "Zidane: A Twenty-first Century Portrait," screening at Anthology Film Archives and at BAM Oct. 24-30, is a documentary directed by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno and filmed by the great Darius Khondji. It focusses on Zidane alone during a match in April, 2005, between his club at the time, Real Madrid, and Villarreal. There is no commentary, no buildup, nothing about his career or his Algerian background. We are granted only fleeting opportunities to observe the patterns of the game; most of the movie tracks its man in solitude as he bides his time and bursts into activity. Even when he is ejected near the end, for his role in a brawl, we barely see the incident—all of which will be exasperating, to filmgoers and soccer fans alike. Allow yourself to submit to the film's design, however, to the scuffling roar of its recorded sound and the pulse of its music, and, like a session of hypnotherapy, it may just work its magic.

—*Anthony Lane*



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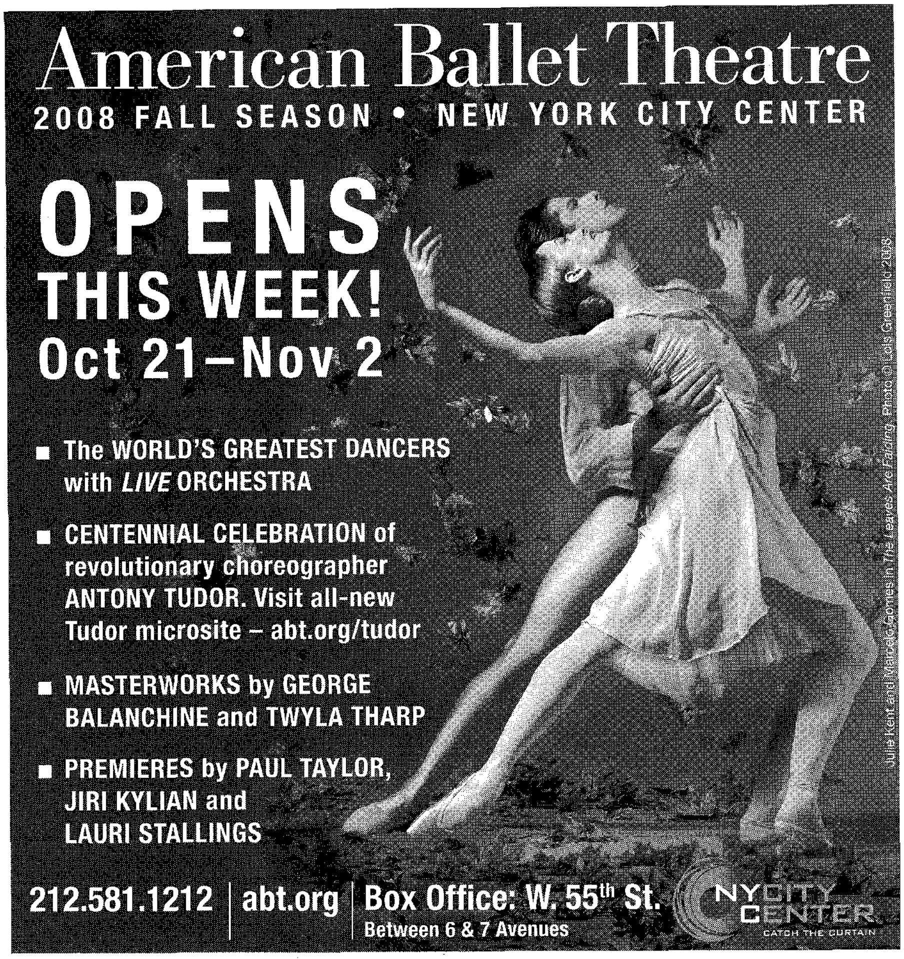
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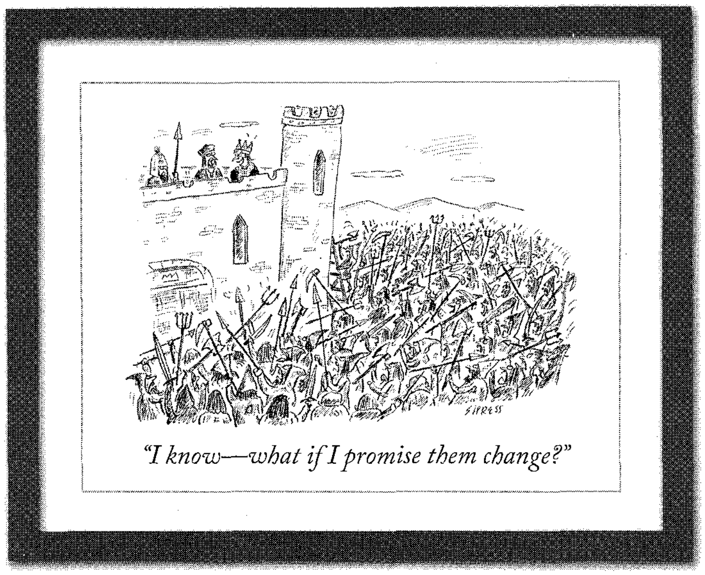
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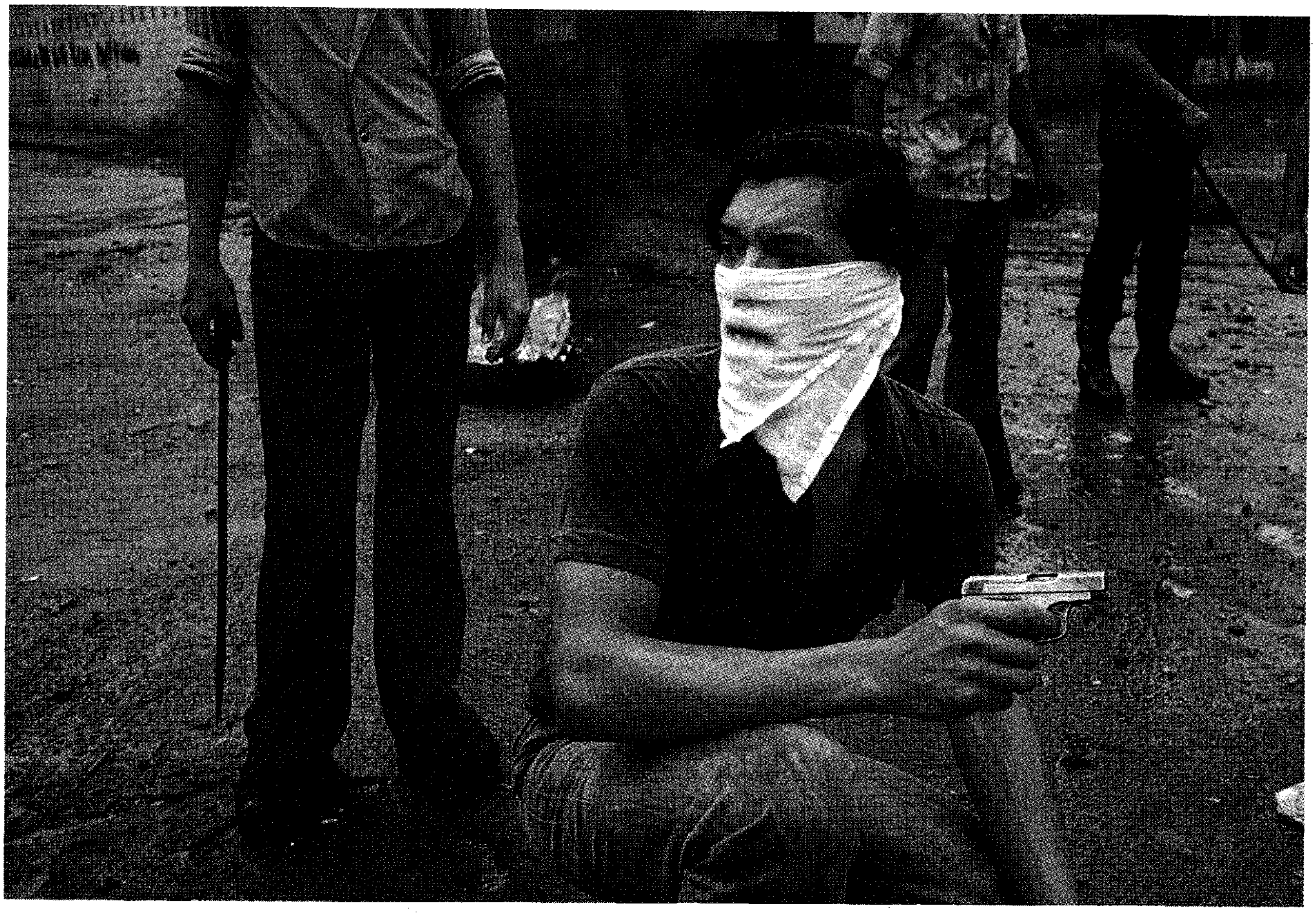


*"Street Fighter, Managua, Nicaragua, 1979," by Susan Meiselas, at the International Center of Photography.*

MAGNUM

teen young American design studios. Two are planning buildings, but most are cooking up surfaces and textures; it's bewildering to imagine what one might do with their inventions, but they look formidably cool. Florencia Pita, working as FPmod, sheathes a wall in flamboyant orange flowers milled in high-density foam and cast urethane. The Ruy Klein firm works in aluminum-and-nylon composite, forming 3D-printed decorative bricks filigreed like fallen leaves or desiccated bone. These might come in handy for Hirsuta (a.k.a. Jason Payne), who proposes the renovation of a one-room schoolhouse in Utah, in a gorgeous model made of undulating wood. Through Nov. 22. (Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-226-3970.)

### *Short List*

**HILARY BERSETH / KEVIN ZUCKER:** Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930. Through Nov. 9. **NICOLE CHERUBINI:** Smith-Stewart, 53 Stanton St. 212-477-2821. Through Nov. 16. **JONATHAN HOROWITZ:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Nov. 15. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Opens Oct. 23.

## DANCE

**AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE**

The company kicks off its season with "Citizen," a new ensemble work by the former Hubbard Street dancer Lauri Stallings, set to Max Richter's sombre "On the Nature of Daylight" and "November." The emotional heft of Antony Tudor's "The Leaves Are Fading" and "Pillar of Fire" and Jiří Kylián's "Overgrown Path" is offset by the high spirits of Twyla Tharp's jazzy romp "Baker's Dozen" and Paul Taylor's portrait of nineteen-forties America, "Company B," a company première. On Oct. 28, A.B.T. shows off its newest acquisition, the pint-sized virtuoso Daniil Simkin, partnering Sarah Lane in the show-stopping pas de deux from the Soviet ballet "Flames of Paris." ♦ Oct. 22 at 7:30: "Baker's Dozen," "Citizen," "The Leaves Are Fading," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ Oct. 23 at 7:30: "The Leaves Are Fading," "Overgrown Path," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ Oct. 24 at 8: "Overgrown Path," "Pillar of Fire," and "Company B." ♦ Oct. 25 at 2: "Baker's Dozen," "Citizen," "Pillar of Fire," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ Oct. 25 at 8: "Overgrown Path," "The Leaves Are Fading," and "Company B." ♦ Oct. 26 at 1:30: "The Leaves Are Fading," "Baker's Dozen," "Citizen," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ Oct. 26 at 7: "Baker's Dozen," "Citizen," "Pillar of Fire," and "Company B." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Nov. 2.)

**BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE**

The Australian indigenous company presents "Awakenings." (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 21 and Oct. 23-25 at 7:30.)

**ODC/DANCE**

Brenda Way's grounded, athletic, and highly individual dancers present four new works. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 21-22 at 7:30, Oct. 23-24 at 8, Oct. 25 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 26 at 2.)

**LUCIANA ACHUGAR**

The Uruguay-born experimental choreographer and dancer presents "The Sublime Is Us," in which five performers literally feel their way around the relationship between dancer and spectator. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 21-23 and Oct. 28 at 7:30 and Oct. 24-25 at 7:30 and 9:30. Through Nov. 1.)

**ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER/ROSAS**

The Belgian choreographer and her ensemble, Rosas, package some of the products of her longstanding interest in the music of Steve Reich. "Piano Phase," a duet from 1982, established De Keersmaeker's reputation, her association with the composer, and her basic method: a rigorous and elegant visualization of Reich's repetitions, the dancers shifting subtly in and out of sync. Later pieces—"Drumming," from 1998, and the new "Eight Lines" and "Four Organs"—apply similar strategies to larger casts. The contemporary-music ensemble Ictus accompanies. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 22-25 at 7:30.)

**ROSEANNE SPRADLIN**

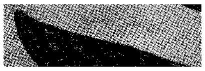
Much of Spradlin's recent work has probed extreme states and dark corners of the psyche. Now, with "Blue Liz," she turns her attention to the nineteen-sixties. The title comes from an Andy Warhol painting of Elizabeth Taylor, and the emergence of Pop Art is a theme. Yet Spradlin characteristically brings out the darker shades of the era's bright aesthetic and the undercurrent of a nation at war. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 23 and Oct. 25 at 8 and Oct. 24 at 8 and 10.)

**TAMI STRONACH DANCE**

"But It's for You" opens with a short and absorbing solo for the choreographer, an exposed evocation of night sweats that, turning in on itself and stopping for quirky gestures, establishes the vocabulary of what's to come. The duet that follows, for Lindsey Dietz-Marchant and Darren Wright, is brighter on the surface, set among flower pots and balloons and a man on stilts. But there's a wise, funny-sad tartness to its view of the emotional business of giving and receiving—much like the lemonade that Wright makes for Dietz-Marchant, and as sweet and fresh. (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 23-25 at 8:30.)

**NOW DANCE COMPANY**

In-Young Sohn, a former member of the Korean National Dance Company and an avatar of the nascent Korean modern-dance movement, brings her company to NYU's Skirball Center, to perform shamanic dances, harvest-festival rites, and a contemporary exploration of the aesthetic connections between calligraphy and dance. (566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-545-7536. Oct. 24 at 8.)



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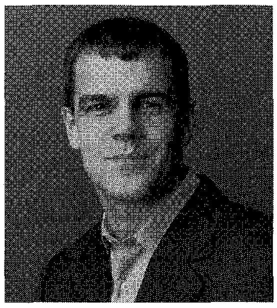

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**SARA JULI**
Juli takes on the subject of mortality, not as a spiritual question or an abstract idea but, in her usual m.o., as a direct, concrete reality. Her solo show "Death" explores the discomfort and terror elicited by this subject through a combination of movement, spoken text, singing, and awkward interactions with her public. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 24-26 at 8:30. Through Nov. 2.)

**CHRISTOPHER WHEELDON**
As part of its "Breaking Ground" lecture series, the 92nd Street Y hosts the charming British-born choreographer, fresh from the successful second season of Morphoses/The Wheeldon Company. Wheeldon and the veteran dance critic Deborah Jowitt will discuss his vision for the future of his company and his take on contemporary ballet. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 27 at 8:15.)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC
## OPERA

**METROPOLITAN OPERA**
Mary Zimmerman's daring—and rewarding—new production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor"** stars Diana Damrau (in the title role), along with Piotr Beczala, Vladimir Stoyanov, and Ildar Abdrazakov; Marco Armiliato, the Met's reliable Italian hand, is on the podium. (Oct. 22 at 8 and Oct. 25 at 1.) ♦ The beloved Franco Zeffirelli production of **"La Traviata"** returns to the house with a cast led by Anja Harteros, Massimo Giordano, and Andrzej Dobber; Paolo Carignani. (Oct. 23 and Oct. 27 at 8.) ♦ Though excitingly controversial at its 2006 première—the cinematic sweep, the puppet boy—Anthony Minghella's production of **"Madama Butterfly"** is set to become an honorable survivor. Patricia Racette, a superb interpreter of the title role, leads an impressive cast that also features Maria Zifchak, Roberto Aronica, and Dwayne Croft; Patrick Summers. (Oct. 24 at 8.) ♦ The Met presents the New York première of John Adams's **"Doctor Atomic,"** an opera that gives a lyrical tone and a mythic dimension to the invention of the atomic bomb, at Los Alamos at the end of the Second World War. Two superb singers, Gerald Finley and Eric Owens, reprise their San Francisco roles of J. Robert Oppenheimer and his nemesis, General Leslie Groves; Sasha Cooke sings the role of Kitty Oppenheimer; Alan Gilbert conducts. (Oct. 25 at 8:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC**
David Robertson, known for his sharp-edged interpretations of modern repertory, sticks to the classics in his next concert with the Philharmonic (where he's a regular guest): Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2 (with Leonidas Kavakos), along with symphonies by Mozart (No. 34 in C Major) and Brahms (No. 3 in F Major). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 23 and Oct. 28 at 7:30, Oct. 24 at 11 A.M., and Oct. 25 at 8.)

**MUSICA SACRA: THE ST. JOHN PASSION**
The Bach Passions, usually reserved for Easter, make absorbing listening at any time. Kent Tritle's admired professional chorus (joined by the one-hundred-and-fifty-voice Musica Sacra Chorale Choir), with orchestra, offers the St. John at Lincoln Center's Rose Theatre; the vocal soloists include Rufus Müller (the Evangelist) and Matt Boehler (Jesus). (Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Oct. 22 at 8.)

**BERNSTEIN'S "MASS"**
Some fans of Leonard Bernstein hold "Mass"—a "theatre piece for singers, players, and dancers" produced, for the Kennedy Center, at the height of the Vietnam War—at arm's length, put off by its shameless emotionalism and strenuously left-wing political drift. Others, finding a depth of humanity unequalled in any of the composer's other works, embrace it fully—including Carnegie Hall, which offers two performances. Oct. 24 at 8: Stern Auditorium will somehow contain the forces needed for the work, which include not only the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (conducted by Marin Alsop) and the baritone Jubilant Sykes but also the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, the Morgan State University Choir, and the Stony Brook University Marching Band. (Carnegie Hall.) ♦ Oct. 25 at 3: In a repeat performance at the United Palace Theatre, in Washington Heights, Alsop, the B.S.O., and her assembled throng will be joined by four hundred singers and dancers from New York City schools. (Broadway at 175th St.) (212-247-7800. For information about the Bernstein Festival's extensive schedule of events, see www.carnegiehall.org.)

**JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA**
James Conlon conducts the conservatory's leading ensemble in the world première of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's "Symphony No. 5: Concerto for Orchestra," followed by another Fifth Symphony—Gustav Mahler's. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 27 at 8.)

## RECITALS

**CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER**
Oct. 22 at 7:30: The Parisii Quartet, a distinctive French ensemble, performs Pierre Boulez's rarely heard "Livre pour Quatuor" as an interlude between—*mais oui*—the string quartets of Debussy and Ravel. ♦ Oct. 26 at 5 and Oct. 28 at 7:30: The powerhouse contralto Ewa Podleś, in town to sing in "La Gioconda" at the Met, extends her stay to offer two classic works—Respighi's "Il Tramonto" and Haydn's "Arianna a Naxos"—with members of the Society, who will also perform pieces by Bach, Janáček, William Bolcom, and John Corigliano. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788.)

**ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET**
The ensemble, unmatched for both the passion and precision of its playing, joins an old friend, the clarinettist Todd Palmer, for a program featuring Mozart's Clarinet Quintet and Dvořák's Quartet No. 13 in G Major, along with a new work by David Bruce. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 23 at 7:30.)

**PHOENIX CONCERTS: "A NED ROREM CELEBRATION"**
In the only local commemoration of the eighty-fifth birthday of one of New York's most beloved composers, members of the ensemble (in residence at the Church of St. Matthew and St. Timothy) perform "Autumn Music," "Three Slow Pieces," and "Spring Music" (originally written for the Beaux Arts Trio). (26 W. 84th St. Oct. 24 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

**BARGEMUSIC**
Boston's Borromeo String Quartet, an ensemble that manages to be both elegant and exciting, offers performances of quartets by Ives (the rambunctious No. 1, "A Revival Service") and Schumann (the impassioned No. 1 in A Minor), as well as a recent piece by J. Mark Scearce. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Oct. 24 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

**LISA MOORE: "WIRES, WORDS, AND HAMMERS"**
New York's queen of avant-garde piano offers a recital of works by Frederic Rzewski (in honor of his seventieth birthday), Martin Bresnick (a première), and Randy Newman, along with a conceptual piece by the Dada genius Kurt Schwitters ("Ursonate"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 25 at 8.)

**MAURIZIO POLLINI**
The commanding Italian pianist offers a concert of bedrock masterworks at Carnegie Hall: Beethoven's "Tempest" and "Appassionata" Sonatas, Schumann's Fantasy in C Major, and Chopin's Four Mazurkas, Op. 33, and Scherzo No. 2 in B-Flat Minor. (212-247-7800. Oct. 26 at 3.)

**ARGENTO CHAMBER ENSEMBLE**
The vibrant new group, dedicated to bringing music by leading European modernists to the city, offers music by three Austrian masters—Bernhard Lang, Beat Furrer, and Georg Friedrich Haas—in the cabaret-style Thalia Theatre at Symphony Space. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 27 at 7:30.)

**"MAKING MUSIC: GEORGE CRUMB"**
Crumb, no longer a nineteen-seventies fad but a canonical American composer, joins Carnegie Hall's Jeremy Geffen in conversation and to enjoy performances of his works (including "Voice of the Whale" and the New York première of "Voices from the Morning of the Earth") by an ensemble of leading new-music advocates (along with his daughter, the Broadway star Ann Crumb). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 27 at 7:30.)

**ANDRÁS SCHIFF**
Schiff, whose lyrical but mercurial and implacably driven style makes him a surprising Beethoven interpreter, continues his Carnegie Hall survey of the piano recitals with a concert offering four of them (including the "Tempest" and "Waldstein" Sonatas). (212-247-7800. Oct. 28 at 8.)

## MOVIES
## OPENING

**BEN X**
A drama from Belgium, directed by Nic Balthazar, about a boy with Asperger's syndrome who is victimized by bullies. In Flemish. Opening Oct. 24. (Cinema Village.)

**CHANGELING**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 24. (In wide release.)

**FEAR(S) OF THE DARK**
Six short animated horror films directed by the graphic artists Blutch, Charles Burns, Marie Caillou, Pierre Di Sciullo, Lorenzo Mattotti, and Richard McGuire. Opening Oct. 22. (IFC Center.)

**HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3: SENIOR YEAR**
The troupe is about to graduate and is hoping to remain friends. Directed by Kenny Ortega; starring Zac Efron, Vanessa Anne Hudgens, and Ashley Tisdale. Opening Oct. 24. (In wide release.)

**I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG**
Kristin Scott Thomas stars in this drama, directed by Philippe Claudel, about a woman who is released from prison after fifteen years and moves in with her sister. In French. Opening Oct. 24. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

**JOHNNY GOT HIS GUN**
Rowan Joseph directed this film of a stage adaptation of the 1971 movie, starring Benjamin McKenzie in the role of a mutilated soldier recalling his earlier life. Opening Oct. 24. (Quad Cinema.)

**LET THE RIGHT ONE IN**
A teen-vampire drama from Sweden, directed by Tomas Alfredson. Opening Oct. 24. (Angelika Film Center.)

**PRIDE AND GLORY**
A New York police family saga, in which an officer (Edward Norton) uncovers a corruption case that involves his brother-in-law (Colin Farrell). Directed by Gavin O'Connor; co-starring Jon Voight. Opening Oct. 24. (In wide release.)

**SAVING MARRIAGE**
A documentary about the battle in Massachusetts over gay marriage; directed by Mike Roth and John Henning. Opening Oct. 24. (Quad Cinema.)

**SAW V**
A horror movie, directed by David Hackl; starring Tobin Bell. Opening Oct. 24. (In wide release.)

**STRANDED**
Gonzalo Arijón directed this documentary, about the survivors of a 1972 plane crash in the snow-bound Andes. In Spanish. Opening Oct. 22. (Film Forum.)

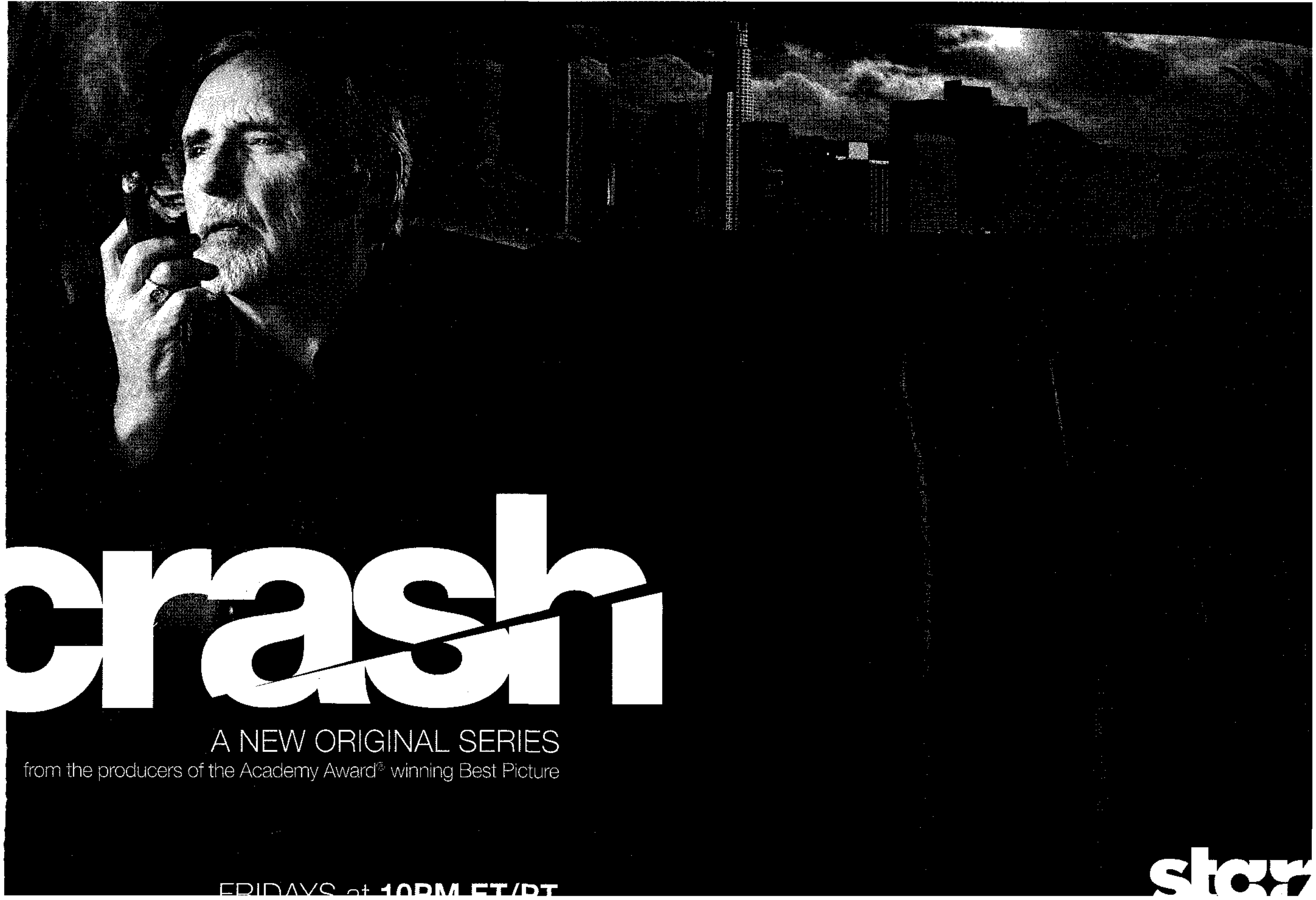
**SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK**
A drama, written and directed by Charlie Kaufman, about a theatre director (Philip Seymour Hoffman) who creates a replica of a city inside a warehouse. Co-starring Michelle Williams, Catherine Keener, and Tilda Swinton. Opening Oct. 24. (In wide release.)

**THE UNIVERSE OF KEITH HARING**
Christina Clausen directed this documentary about the late artist. Opening Oct. 24. (Cinema Village.)

**ZIDANE: A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PORTRAIT**
An experimental documentary about the French soccer star Zinédine Zidane, by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno. Opening Oct. 24. (Anthology Film Archives and BAM.)

## NOW PLAYING

**APPALOOSA**
A well-made, satisfying, traditionalist Western with some odd quirks and turns. Virgil Cole (Ed Harris) and his deputy, Everett Hitch (Viggo Mortensen), are guns for hire in the Old West—longtime partners who communicate mainly with glances, nods, a few gnomic words, and a deepening stillness that suddenly explodes into violence. In 1882, they enter Appaloosa, a New Mexico frontier town, and offer their services to people who are being terrorized by a rapacious landowner and gang leader (Jeremy Irons). The movie offers a fresh character in Allie French (Renée Zellweger), who seems, at first, the usual refined lady from the East. She latches onto Virgil, breaking up the chaste, straightback-mountain love affair of Virgil and Hitch, but she's not quite what either man expects—that is, she's neither a wife nor a whore but a little of both. Harris, who directed, revels in the wide-open spaces and the drab, dusty little towns; the Old West comes off as a scary and melancholy place. Shot outside of Santa Fe by Dean Semler. With Timothy Spall and Ariadna Gil.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/29/08.) (In wide release.)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### ASHES OF TIME REDUX

The Hong Kong-based director Wong Kar-Wai oversaw the restoration of his imagistic 1994 lone-swordsman spectacle, and the result is splashy, arch, and unengaging. The intricate story, based on a novel by Louis Cha, takes place in a vaguely mythical past and nests plots within plots, all of which lead back to the hermit-like killer Ouyang Feng (Leslie Cheung), who left home to seek glory. In his absence, his fiancée (Maggie Cheung) married his brother, and, having sought refuge in solitude, Ouyang now ekes out a spare living as a hit man. Wong's visuals are calculated to the millimetre to impress, but the speckles of light that pierce a wicker birdcage and the slow-motion blur of bloody sword fights have all the empty allure of a television commercial, and neither character nor drama nor acting nor even a scintilla of spontaneous invention has any place in them. In Mandarin and Cantonese.—*Richard Brody* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

### BLINDNESS

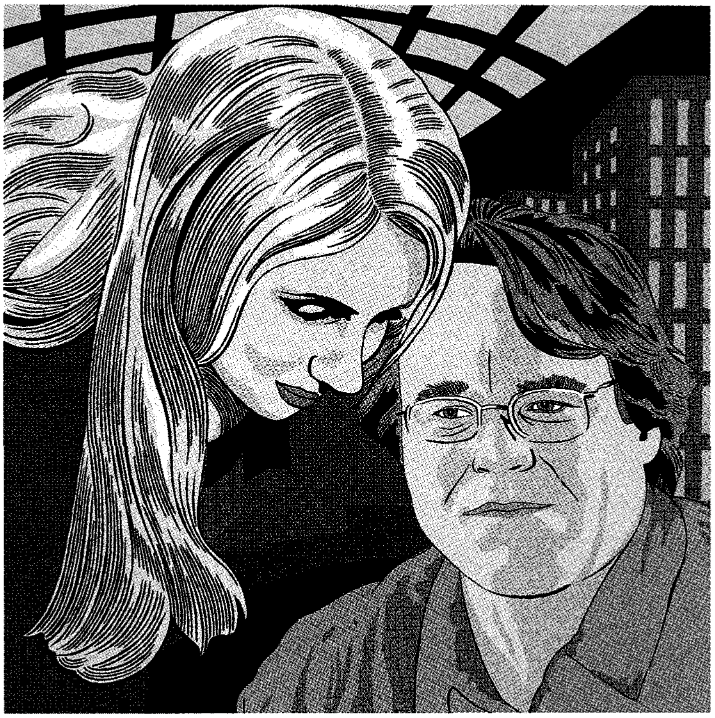
A man goes blind at the wheel of a car, and, one by one, the surrounding population—perhaps, who knows, the rest of the civilized world—follows suit. Whatever the cause, civilization itself begins to fray. A doctor (Mark Ruffalo), now blind, is quarantined in a secure facility, hemmed in by armed guards and forced first into proximity, and then into open discord, with a group of fellow-sufferers. The movie, written by Don McKellar and directed by Fernando Meirelles, is adapted from the novel by the Nobel laureate José Saramago, and it preserves both the bones of the plot and some of the authorial strategies—no character, for instance, is allotted a name. The book's insistence on the helpless moral numbing of society is flattened onscreen into a kind of savage dullness, and much of Meirelles's film, especially its sagging middle portion, comes across as a parable that badly wants (and badly fails) to be a story. Julianne Moore plays the doctor's wife, who can still see but neglects, for some reason, to say so. With a miscast Gael García Bernal, as the young tyrant of the blind ward, and Danny Glover, as his wise old opposite number.—*Anthony Lane* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

### BODY OF LIES

This shrewd and tightly drawn anti-terror thriller, directed by Ridley Scott, suggests that the C.I.A. has all the technical advantages but not enough of the human intelligence to combat Mideast terrorism. The field agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) is just about the best there is, but his efforts on the ground are often confounded by a higher-up, Hoffman (Russell Crowe), who manages him via cell phone and laptop from the Washington suburbs. Hoffman, an American consumer of advanced technology and vast amounts of food, is too impatient; in the end, he's dependent on help from the brilliant but secretive head of Jordanian intelligence (the English actor Mark Strong, in a witty performance). The movie has the usual tropes of the genre—surveillance shots from drones, S.U.V.s tearing across the desert, explosions, scenes of torture—but Scott manages the space and timing better than most thriller directors. William Monahan adapted David Ignatius's novel. Shot in Morocco.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

### CEILING ZERO

Howard Hawks's fast, loud, rowdy yet death-infused drama, from 1936, depicts the daily daredevilry of Newark-based airmail pilots at odds with the elements, the equipment, the authorities, and each other. As Jake Lee, the former First World War ace now confined to a desk, Pat O'Brien manages the operations masterfully, spewing orders like an auctioneer, but he puts his reputation and his job on the line when his wartime buddy and best friend, Dizzy Davis (James Cagney), a younger pilot with boundless skills and an even bigger ego, turns up in need of a job. The frozen calm with which, in the first scene, a pair of flyers parachute from a failing plane exemplifies the mastery of fear that is Hawks's main subject, and it carries over to the ground: the resulting tangles of romantic intrigue are handled with the same understated aplomb (though, true to form, the director offers plenty of equal-opportunity innuendo about flyers sharing women and flyers sharing bedrooms). Some little-known character actors shine in sharply conceived turns, while Cagney, with his usual angular grace, keeps the action going with bluster and blarney. His outsized, reckless strut suggests the film's surprising inside-Hollywood angle, which is also Hawks's own: what happens when a lark becomes a business and then an institution.—*R.B.* (BAM; Oct. 23.)



*"Synecdoche, New York," directed by Charlie Kaufman, opens Oct. 24.*

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

### THE DUCHESS

A slice from the life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Keira Knightley), who, we are told, cut a swath through English high society in the second half of the eighteenth century. The swath, as represented in Saul Dibb's film, seems less than formidable; the heroine's political acumen is displayed early on, in repartee at dinner, but then left largely to wilt, and her most memorable social appearance is a drunken stagger, during which her hedge-size wig catches fire. Ralph Fiennes plays her husband in a clever and, one suspects, accurate portrayal of a chilly pragmatist bent on producing an heir. If there is dullness at the heart of the film, that may be due less to the director (though he should have cut it by a good ten minutes) than to the source material; attempts to link Georgiana's story with a broken royal marriage of more recent vintage are tendentious at best. The most diverting character is Lady Elizabeth Foster (Hayley Atwell), the Duke's mistress, who moved in to create a ménage à trois, and who should have been the heroine of this movie. Atwell is bewitching enough to have held it in her spell. With Charlotte Rampling and, as Charles James Fox, a sly Simon McBurney.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

### EAGLE EYE

A sloppy but entertaining technology-gone-wild thriller, about a slacker (Shia LaBeouf) who teams up with a threatened mom (Michelle Monaghan) when they receive sinister instructions from a disembodied voice. The film, directed by D. J. Caruso, is packed with action sequences that recall hits of the past (such as "North by Northwest" and "Enemy of the State") and which are so swiftly and energetically staged that their familiarity is almost welcome. The twists and turns of the plot—whom the two protagonists are running from, what they're doing—are more manufactured than written, but Caruso and the host of screenwriters craft the film's theme of paranoid surveillance for speed, not plausibility. They fail to say anything Orwellian about the times we live in; the hectic overplotting is so consumer-driven that it nearly devours itself.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

### FILTH AND WISDOM

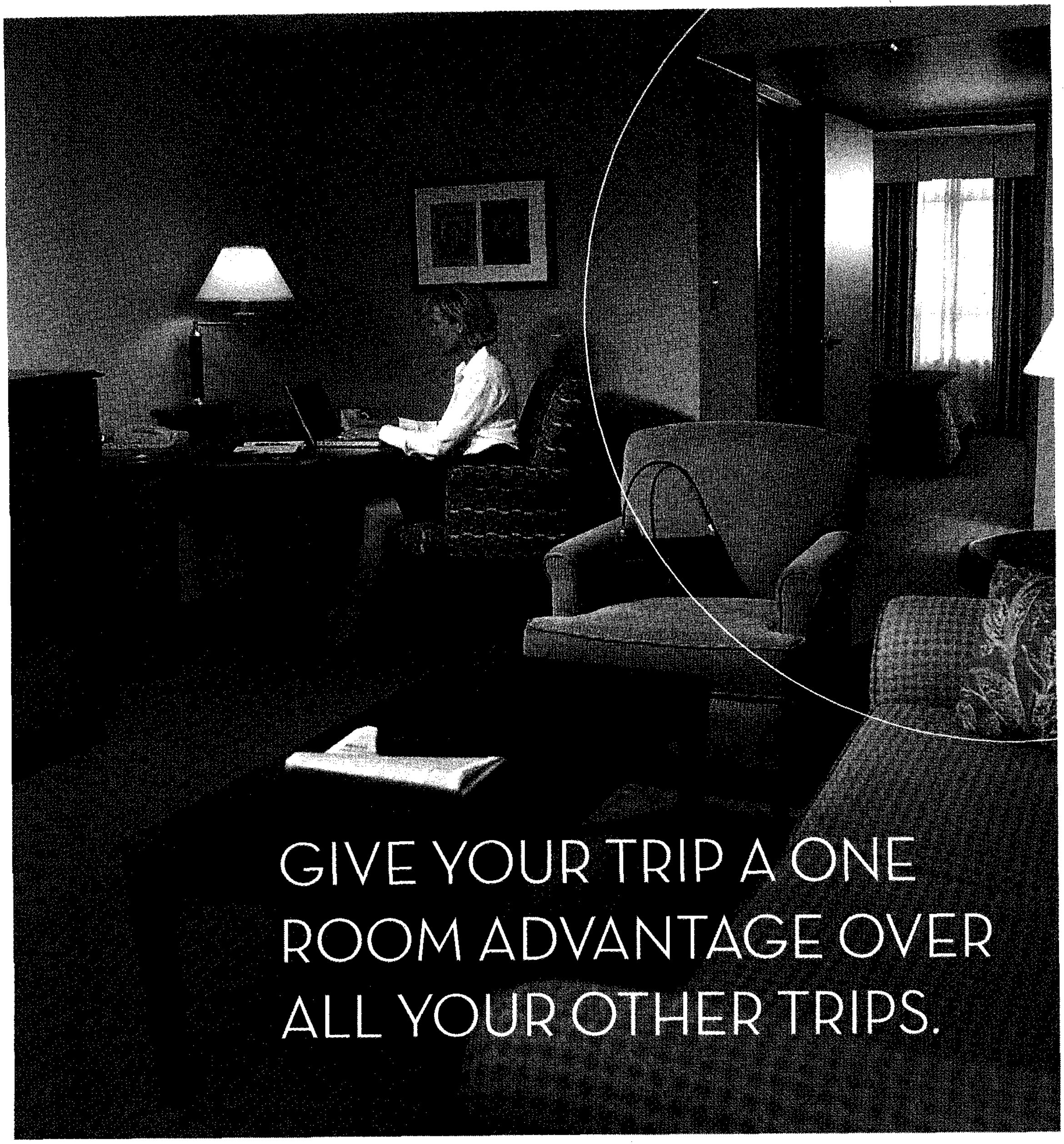
Exciting news for those who never tire of Madonna's self-transformations: here is yet another change of tack. For her latest trick, she has become a film director, or has, at any rate, made faltering steps in that direction. The hero of her tale, Andriy, is played by Eugene Hutz, the explosively hairy front man of a band called Gogol Bordello. (That name itself has more rough poetry than anything in the movie.) Andriy shares an apartment in London with Holly (Holly Weston), a dancer, and Juliette (Vicky McClure), an ordinary kleptomaniac pharmaceutical assistant. Also thrown into the mix is Juliette's heartsick employer (Inder Manocha) and, horror of horrors, a blind and lachrymose poet (Richard E. Grant). Madonna scholars will be unsurprised to learn that sexual conduct is limited to the sadomasochistic. Somewhere in this stew of stories is an attempt to savor the many ingredients of a modern multicultural city, as well as an old-style injunction to follow your dream, but neither is discernible for long, due to the ham-fisted nature of the filmmaking. Lighting, script, and performances seem unreleasably poor, and there is a shameful dabbling in ethnic stereotypes; the one proud virtue of the enterprise, in fact, is a running time of little more than eighty minutes.—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

### FLASH OF GENIUS

In the past, the affable effortlessness of Greg Kinnear's performances successfully masked the nuanced actor's tightly focussed range. In this film, Kinnear gets around his amiable veneer in the role of the electrical engineer Robert Kearns, who developed the intermittent windshield wiper and spent years fighting the big automakers for recognition. Kinnear plays him as a stubborn idealist, obsessive and anxious in his pursuit for justice, and his performance holds the story together. But the film, directed by Marc Abraham and written by Philip Railsback (based on a *New Yorker* article by John Seabrook), is slow going. It's so meticulous about getting the David-vs.-Goliath atmosphere right that it neglects to build any real drama. For all Kearns's heroic sacrifices and heartbreaking missteps, the film offers only a muted sense of the man, whom it turns audience-friendly for only a moment of triumph.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

### HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

Poppy (Sally Hawkins), the single, thirty-year-old London schoolteacher in Mike Leigh's comedy, bounces on a trampoline after school, but she doesn't need much of a lift—she's already airborne. Is possession of the happiness gene enough to get you through life without harm? Or, putting it less grandly, can a woman as cheerful as Poppy serve as the protagonist of a full-length movie? Leigh, who directs with a carefree assurance (after much rehearsal with the actors) matches his heroine against a series of adversaries—an iron-willed flamenco dancer, a bully boy in her class, a driving instructor (Eddie Marsan) who is so rule-bound that he's choking with rage—all of whom try to overcome unhappiness by behaving aggressively or living as rigidly as possible. The movie is not an argument for chaos; it's an argument for making one's way through life with a relaxed will and an open heart. With Alexis Zegerman as Poppy's dyspeptic roommate.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)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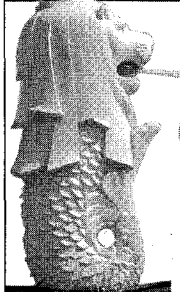

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**JIMMY THE GENT**
Swift, lowdown entertainment. James Cagney is the title character, who's in the racket of finding heirs for uncollected fortunes; Bette Davis is his former girl Friday, who's gone to work for the fake-classy competition (Alan Dinehart). To win her back, Cagney—who sports a close-to-the-skull haircut that (as Andrew Bergman once observed) gives him the profile of a Boston terrier and a back-of-the-head resemblance to Sluggo—tries to gentrify himself. What makes his performance so richly humorous is his knack for revealing incongruous yearnings beneath the brutal veneer. He and Davis are a perfect match—they know how to soften their personae without weakening their spines. The whole movie has a healthy cynicism: it targets hypocrisy and people who put on airs. (After he sips too much tea, Cagney's stomach sounds like faulty plumbing.) Directed by Michael Curtiz; released in 1934.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Oct. 25.)

**LAKEVIEW TERRACE**
Neil LaBute's latest film, written by David Loughery and Howard Korder, is hard to place. It begins as a seething social drama, with the arrival of a mixed-race couple (Patrick Wilson and Kerry Washington) in a placid, law-abiding corner of Los Angeles. Here they bump up against their next-door neighbor, Abel Turner (Samuel L. Jackson), a policeman of implacable pride and prejudice. Jackson revels in the role, lording it over the other characters and turning the tale into a comedy of aggression and unease; you can sense the pleasure that he and LaBute derive from jostling the audience's racial attitudes. It's a shame, then, that the latter stages of the movie let us off the hook, settling for the contrivances and showdowns of a standard thriller; the setup seemed both more potent and more plausible when it was allowed to simmer. With Regine Nehy, who plays Abel's teenage daughter with a perfect blend of languor and defiance, and who deserves to go far.—*A.L.* (9/22/08) (In wide release.)

**NIGHTS AND WEEKENDS**
The Chicago resident Joe Swanberg and the New York-based Greta Gerwig directed and star in this "mumblecore" romantic drama as James, a video-game designer who lives in Chicago, and Maddie, a New York nursing student who writes in her spare time. In the opening long take, as they enter James's apartment, they strip each other in a minute and nineteen seconds, giving rise to a performance by Swanberg that is hard to fake. The humid intimacy makes clear what the filmmakers think love is based on, but what soon strains the couple's long-distance bond is their absence from the wider web of each other's lives. As portrayed by the inventive Gerwig, Maddie, who is whimsically articulate and quietly tempestuous, is in command of the relationship; Swanberg makes James merely a man—stolid, ambitious, capable, sentimental, and self-absorbed. The seemingly improvised dialogue and unblocked staging lend emotional weight to their fleeting glances and sudden gestures, and such moments as a brief, inspired, tender streetside dance blossom exquisitely in real time. Gerwig and Swanberg rely heavily on their cameraman, who sometimes gets close enough to celebrate their beautiful imperfections but usually keeps the onscreen couple at a poignant distance and in ambiguous equilibrium; their raw, highly personalized methods convey the sense that the lives depicted on camera and those lived behind it are one.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

**RACHEL GETTING MARRIED**
The new Jonathan Demme film is one of his slighter and more oddball affairs. It stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who leaves rehab—where she is being treated for drug addiction—to attend the wedding of her sister Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt). This takes place at the family home in Connecticut, which has become, for the occasion, a multiethnic menagerie of liberal optimists, many bearing musical instruments. Not surprisingly, the festive air is spoiled by the intrusion of Kym, who feels constrained by her protective father (Bill Irwin) and then flashes into fearsome combat with her mother (Debra Winger). The movie is too long, and often wearying to watch, taking its visual cues from the unappeasable restlessness of the heroine. Yet the scene in which she is welcomed home, after a car accident, to be bathed and consoled by her sister without a word has a real, if exhausted, tenderness; the smarting emotions on show here are seldom contrived, and anyone versed in family conflict—that is, anyone with a family—will flinch at those moments when Demme cuts close to the bone.—*A.L.* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

**RELIGULOUS**
This documentary, in which the libertarian comedian and talk-show host Bill Maher, along with the director Larry Charles, challenges the legitimacy of religion, is a globe-trotting conversation starter. Maher's softhearted satirical dig at faith and the people who espouse it focusses primarily on literal interpretations of Bible stories (such as those of Noah's ark and Jonah and the whale). His interview technique isn't argumentative—he sees religion as anti-rational—and his comedy plays out as frustration rather than as mean-spiritedness. The filmmakers have smartly chosen to film in locations where the faithful gather, and the film benefits from its you-are-there style. In an odd note of irony, the film is, in effect, preaching to the unconverted.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

**ROCKNROLLA**
Unable to shake off a chronic fixation on criminals, whether petty or domineering, the British director Guy Ritchie—who made "Snatch" and "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels"—has returned to his fantastical vision of a London populated almost entirely by gangsters. Their names read like weak imitations of Runyon: One Two (Gerard Butler), Mumbles (Idris Elba), and Handsome Bob (Tom Hardy). These are lowly folk, under the thumbs of major players like Lenny (Tom Wilkinson) and the Russian interloper, Uri (Karel Roden), but what binds them together, in one scrappy family, is the director's invitation to view their thuggery as consistently amusing. That can be done—"Guys and Dolls" itself aimed at something similar—but Ritchie's command of tone is far too unsteady, and his taste for low-life longueurs much too indulgent, to keep the movie on track, and it crumples into self-parody long before the end. With Thandie Newton, ravishing yet implausible, as an accountant with dirty morals.—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

**SLINGSHOT**
In this interlocking tangle of anecdotal episodes, the Filipino director Brillante Mendoza depicts the hell of chronic urban poverty with plenty of heart and not a shred of sentimentality. The action, centered on a densely inhabited warren of shanties, begins with a nighttime police raid, which allows Mendoza's hyperkinetic camera to dash through corridors and up and down rickety staircases and present a rapid-fire cross-section of its residents and their activities, ranging from sex and prayer to drug use and dividing the spoils of robbery. Honest work is hard to find (one young man, working as a pedicab driver, loses his vehicle to loan sharks and becomes a thief), violence rampant, health care prohibitive (in one of the most moving sequences, a young woman steals to buy dentures), effort unrewarded (university students fall prey to the young "jammers" who rob them), law enforcement capricious and brutal, and politicians part of the problem. Young men swept up in the raid are sprung from jail by a councilman seeking their votes, crowds form in the street to pocket cash payments from competing candidates, and campaign rallies, which are joined with religious celebrations, are hardly more than stomping grounds for pickpockets. Mendoza offers little psychological insight and proposes no solution; his direction is chaotic but his fleeting portraits of people struggling to survive will long remain in memory. In Tagalog.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Oct. 23-27.)

**WHAT JUST HAPPENED**
Hollywood, not for the first time, stares at itself in the mirror. Robert De Niro plays Ben, a producer with problems. These range from the professional, such as the parlous previews of his latest film, to the woundingly intimate, such as his unfaded love for an ex-wife (Robin Wright Penn), who has turned her attentions not just elsewhere but to a mere screenwriter (Stanley Tucci). Real

stars, including Sean Penn and a Moses-bearded Bruce Willis, play versions of themselves, which adds lightly to the air of authenticity, yet the overall atmosphere is too thin and stale to be refreshing. The director is Barry Levinson, and the script was adapted by Art Linson from his own memoirs of the movie business, so nobody could accuse them of not knowing their subject; yet their familiarity gives the project the fatal coziness of an insiders' sport, with few of the one-liners hitting home. A first-rate cast (which includes Catherine Keener and John Turturro) is deployed to press a satirical point with which most of us already agree. As for De Niro, he lacks the expansiveness for the role; if you like your movie producers to be monsters, not whiners, forget this, skip back fifty years or so, and try Rod Steiger in "The Big Knife."—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

### *Also Playing*

**BEVERLY HILLS CHIHUAHUA:** In wide release. **MAX PAYNE:** In wide release. **WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?:** Angelika Film Center.

## REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.*

**ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES**
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Andrzej Wajda and Polish Television Theatre." All films are in Polish. Oct. 24 at 6:45 and Oct. 26 at 4: "Crime and Punishment" (1987). ♦ Oct. 24 at 9:15 and Oct. 26 at 6:30: "Macbeth" (1969). ♦ Oct. 25 at 4:30 and Oct. 27 at 9:30: "Interview with Ballmeyer" (1962). ♦ Oct. 25 at 6 and Oct. 28 at 8: "Hamlet" (1991). ♦ Oct. 25 at 9:15 and Oct. 27 at 7:30: "Bigda's Coming!" (1999). ♦ Oct. 26 at 8:45 and Oct. 28 at 6:30: "June Night" (2001).

**BAM ROSE CINEMAS**
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In première. Oct. 22 at 7: "Deliver" (2007, Jennifer Montgomery), followed by a Q. & A. with the director and members of the cast. ♦ "Cinemachat with Elliott Stein." Oct. 23 at 7:30 and 9:40: "Ceiling Zero" (†). The 7:30 screening will be followed by a discussion with Stein and the photo archivist Howard Mandelbaum.

**FILM FORUM**
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 22-30 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Lola Montès" (1955, Max Ophüls; in French and German).

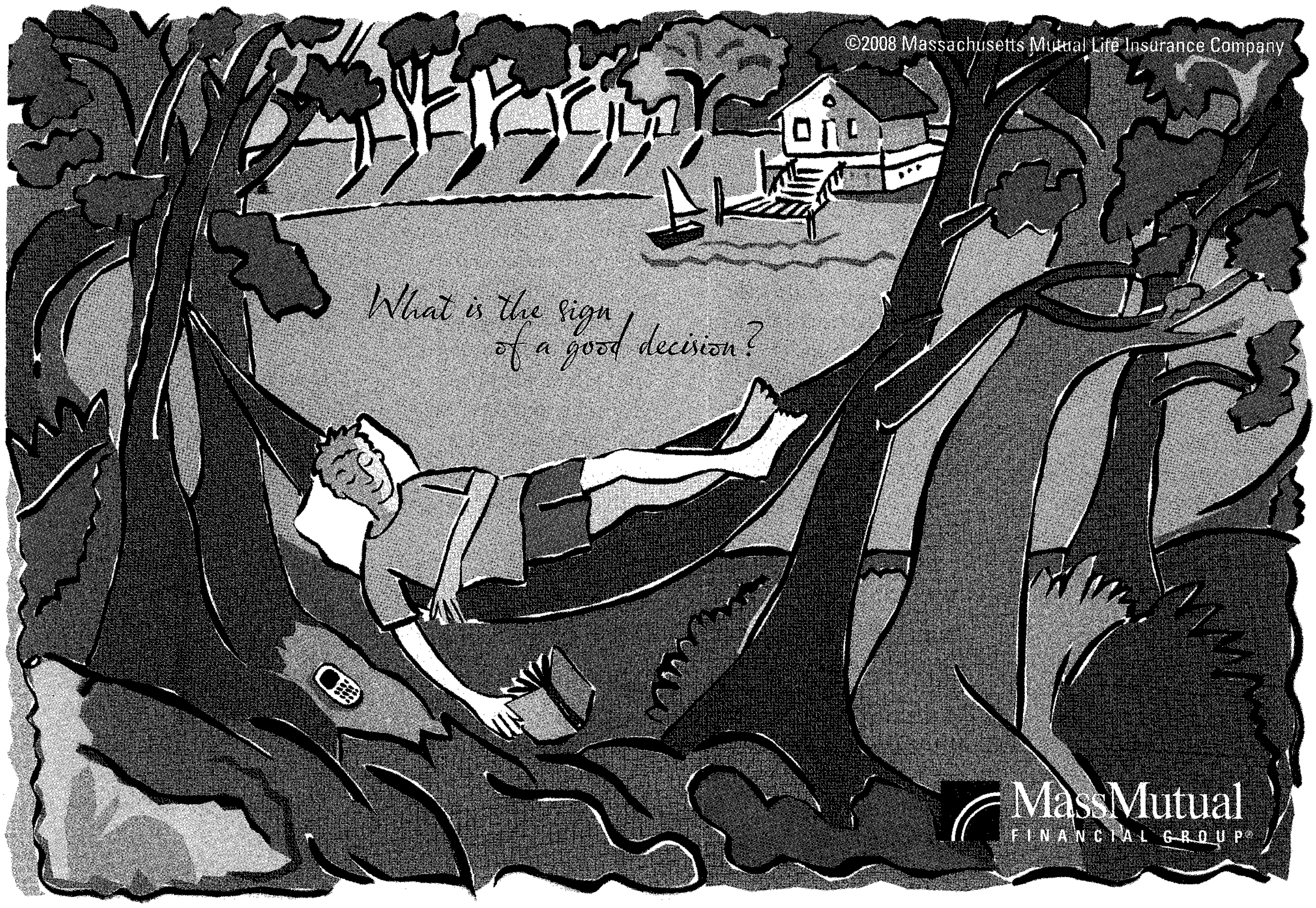
**FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE**
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—I Kiffe NY: French Urban Cultures Festival. Oct. 28 at 12:30 and 7: "The Secret of the Grain" (2007, Abdellatif Kechiche; in French, Arabic, and Russian). ♦ Oct. 28 at 4: "Games of Love and Chance" (2003, Kechiche; in French).

**IFC CENTER**
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Ingmar Bergman. Oct. 24-26 at 11 A.M.: "The Magic Flute" (1975). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 24-25: "Creepshow" (1982, George Romero). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." Oct. 28 at 8: A tribute to the late director St. Clair Bourne.

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Ken Jacobs: Filmmaker Extraordinaire." Oct. 22 at 6: Short-film program, including "Nymph" (2007). ♦ Oct. 22 at 8: "Return to the Scene of the Crime" (2008, Ken Jacobs). ♦ "Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." Oct. 22 at 7: "Hotel Imperial" (1927, Mauritz Stiller; silent). ♦ "ContemporAsian." Oct. 23 at 6, Oct. 24 and Oct. 27 at 4:30, Oct. 25 at 8:30, and Oct. 26 at 6:45: "Slingshot" (†). ♦ The nonfiction films of Amos Gitai. Oct. 24 at 5:45 and Oct. 25 at 12:15: "House" (1980; in Hebrew and Arabic) and "A House in Jerusalem" (1998; in French, English, Arabic, and Hebrew). ♦ Oct. 24 at 8:30, Oct. 25 at 3:15, Oct. 26 at 2:30, and Oct. 27 at 4:15: "News from Home/News from House" (2006; in English, Arabic, and Hebrew). ♦ Oct. 26 at 4:30: "Zion, Auto-Emancipation" (1998; in Hebrew). ♦ "To Save and Project." Oct. 24 at 6:30 and Oct. 25 at 12:30: "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" (1971, Melvin Van Peebles). ♦ Oct. 24 at 8:45: "Millions Like Us" (1943, Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat). ♦ Oct. 25 at 2:30: "Jimmy the Gent" (†). ♦ Oct. 25 at 4: "The River" (1929, Frank Borzage). ♦ Oct. 25 at 6 and Oct. 26 at 12:30: "Lady Windermere's Fan" (1925, Ernst Lubitsch; silent). ♦ Oct. 25 at 8 and Oct. 27 at 6:15: "Dillinger Is Dead" (1969, Marco Ferreri; in Italian). ♦ Oct. 27 at 8:15: "I Am Curious (Yellow)" (1967, Vilgot Sjöman; in Swedish). ♦ "Modern Mondays." Oct. 27 at 7: "Otto; or, Up with Dead People" (2007, Bruce LaBruce; in German and English).

**NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-712-7237)—"The Silent Clowns Film Series." Oct. 26 at 2: "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1920, John S. Robertson), followed by a Q. & A. with the historians Bruce Lawton and Steve Massa.

**THALIA THEATRE**
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Nov. 2: "Paul Schrader's Personal Choice." Oct. 26 at 4 and 8:30: "Day of Wrath" (1943, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish). ♦ Oct. 26 at 6: "Dominion" (2006, Schrader).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**WALTER READE THEATRE**
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Andrzej Wajda. All films are in Polish. Oct. 22 at 2 and Oct. 23 at 8:15: "Samson" (1961). ♦ Oct. 22 at 4:15 and Oct. 26 at 7:40: "Siberian Lady Macbeth" (1962). ♦ Oct. 23 at 6:15: "Innocent Sorcerers" (1960). ♦ Oct. 24 at 1: "Everything for Sale" (1969). ♦ Oct. 25 at 6:30 and Oct. 26 at 1:30: "The Birch Wood" (1970). ♦ Oct. 25 at 8:30 and Oct. 27 at 1: "Ashes" (1965). ♦ Oct. 26 at 3:30 and Oct. 27 at 4:15: "Hunting Flies" (1969). ♦ Oct. 26 at 5:45 and Oct. 28 at 4:45: "Pilate and Others" (1972). ♦ Oct. 26 at 9:40: "Landscape After Battle" (1970). ♦ Oct. 27 at 6:30: "The Wedding" (1973). ♦ Oct. 28 at 8:45: "The Shadow Line" (1976). ♦ Two films by Jon Jost. Oct. 24 at 7: "Oui Non" (2001; in French). ♦ Oct. 24 at 9: "Over Here" (2007). ♦ "*Film Comment* Selects." Oct. 28 at 6:35: "Che!" (1969, Richard Fleischer).

## READINGS AND TALKS

**ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE**
Oct. 22 at 6: Amara Lakhous, the author of the novel "Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio," talks about the changing nature of Italian society with the writer Lorraine Adams and the translator Ann Goldstein. ♦ Oct. 24 at 6: Stefano Bartezzaghi, a columnist for the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, discusses word games and the enigmas of language and literature in Dante's Divine Comedy. In Italian with English translation. (686 Park Ave., between 68th and 69th Sts. 212-879-4242.)

**KGB BAR**
A night of fiction, with Roxana Robinson and Todd Hasak-Lowy. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 26 at 7.)

**NEW SCHOOL**
The poets James Tate and Dara Wier read from and discuss their work. (66 W. 12th St. 212-229-5488. Oct. 27 at 6:30.)

**92ND STREET Y**
The choreographer Christopher Wheeldon talks about his work with the dance critic and writer Deborah Jowitt (see Dance). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 27 at 8:15.)

**192 BOOKS**
Paul Auster and his daughter, Sophie, who is an actress, offer a dramatic reading from Paul's new novel, "A Man in the Dark." (192 Tenth Ave., between 21st and 22nd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. Oct. 22 at 7.)

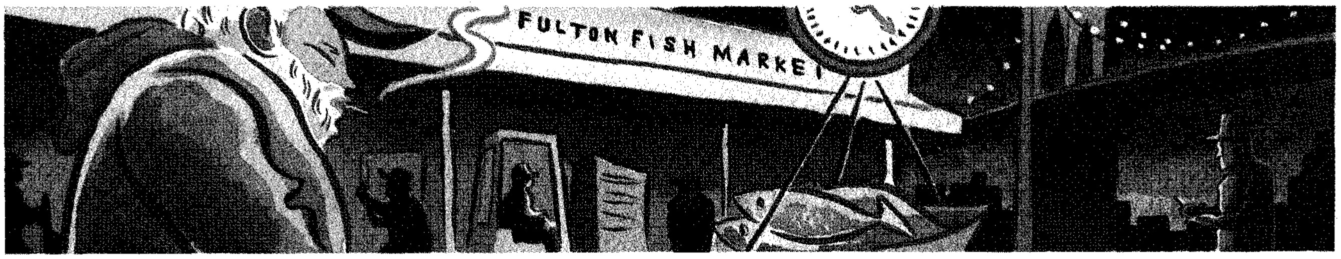
## ABOVE AND BEYOND

**BIG APPLE CIRCUS**
Manhattan's one-ring wonder returns for its thirty-first season with "Play On!" The title comes from Shakespeare ("If music be the food of love . . ."), but the show is pure big top. It features Colombians on the flying trapeze, Chinese acrobats, and a Kazakh equestrian, among other awe-inspiring acts. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. 212-962-5471. Oct. 23-Jan. 18.)

**AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES**
In case you hadn't noticed all the Chippendale chairs and rococo dressers floating around, October is European Decorative Arts Month in the New York auctions world. **Christie's** delves into *pâte-sur-pâte* porcelains (Oct. 21) and nineteenth-century art, mainly academic and Orientalist paintings by such artists as Bouguereau and Corot (Oct. 22), then segues into an auction of elaborate silver and gold objects, including a collection of eighteenth-century gold, enamel, and lacquer boxes (Oct. 23). The week closes with an offering of fine Bordeaux from a private collection, part of the house's wine auction on Oct. 25. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** auction of nineteenth-century and Orientalist art (Oct. 23) includes a strong group of works by Bouguereau and his followers; this sale is framed by two offerings of furniture and decorative objects, one presenting a general selection of nineteenth-century pieces (Oct. 22), the other offering two hundred lots from the collection of the San Francisco decorative-arts dealer Foster Gwin (Oct. 24). The month concludes with a wine sale (Oct. 28) featuring five cases of 1990 Romanée-Conti, four of which make up a single lot. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The British auction house **Bloomsbury**, a new player on the scene, holds a sale of posters (Oct. 22) offering a selection of iconic images ranging from Alphonse Mucha's Art Nouveau "Zodiac" to Josephine Baker at the Folies-Bergère. (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.) ♦ **Swann** presents one of its periodic auctions of magic miscellanea (Oct. 28), featuring a large selection of Houdini stuff: letters, handcuffs, water-torture-cell hardware, the works. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ At **Phillips**, for the hip set, contemporary design meets Japanese manga-inspired toy art, "subversive" jewelry, and photographs at one of the house's "Saturday@Phillips" sales (Oct. 25). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

## NEWYORKER.COM

Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



MARCELLUS HALL

*Celebrating the Fulton Fish Market.*

## ON THE HORIZON

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### ABOVE AND BEYOND
### HEY JOE
*Oct. 29-Nov. 23*

For the past three years, the painter and photographer Naima Rauam has organized a show commemorating the Fulton Fish Market, where she had her studio until the market left Manhattan for the Bronx, in 2005. This year is the centennial of Joseph Mitchell, who captured the fishmongers so memorably in these pages, and the celebration includes a tribute, with walking tours, readings, and other events. (www.artpm.com.)

### MOVIES
### SEEING ASIA
*Nov. 1-9*

Asia Argento's furiously uninhibited performances have graced films by such directors as Catherine Breillat and Abel Ferrara. BAM offers a week of her work, including "Mother of Tears," which she directed. (718-636-4100.)

### ART
### THEATRICAL RELEASE
*Nov. 9-March 22*

In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, Russian artists teamed up with playwrights, actors, dancers, and musicians to create a radically new brand of theatre later stamped out by Stalin. The Jewish Museum will exhibit the murals created in 1920 by Marc Chagall for Moscow's GOSET theatre, alongside more than a hundred costumes and set designs and rarely seen films, photographs, and related ephemera. (212-423-3200.)

### THE THEATRE
### CIRCUITRY
*Nov. 18-22*

The Builders Association brings "Continuous City," a meditation on the way that virtual networking technology affects human relationships, to BAM's Next Wave Festival. (718-636-4100.)

### CLASSICAL MUSIC
### DANNY BOY
*Nov. 28-Dec. 20*

Daniel Barenboim, once the big man of Chicago, is now descending on Gotham. In addition to making his Met début conducting six performances of "Tristan und Isolde," he plays a piano recital on the Met stage (on Dec. 14) and offers a piano-duo concert at Weill Recital Hall with James Levine (Nov. 23). (212-362-6000; 212-247-7800.)

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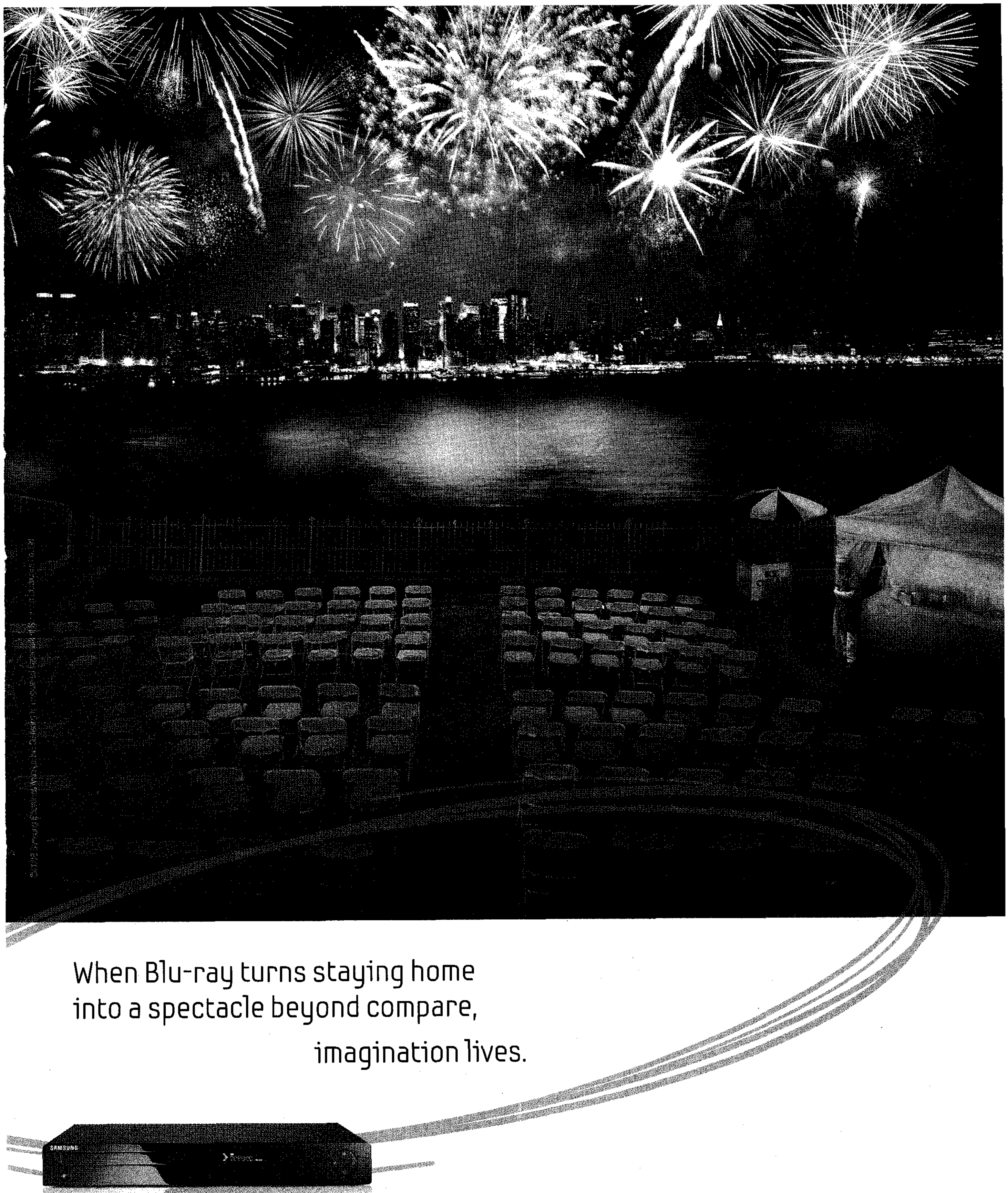
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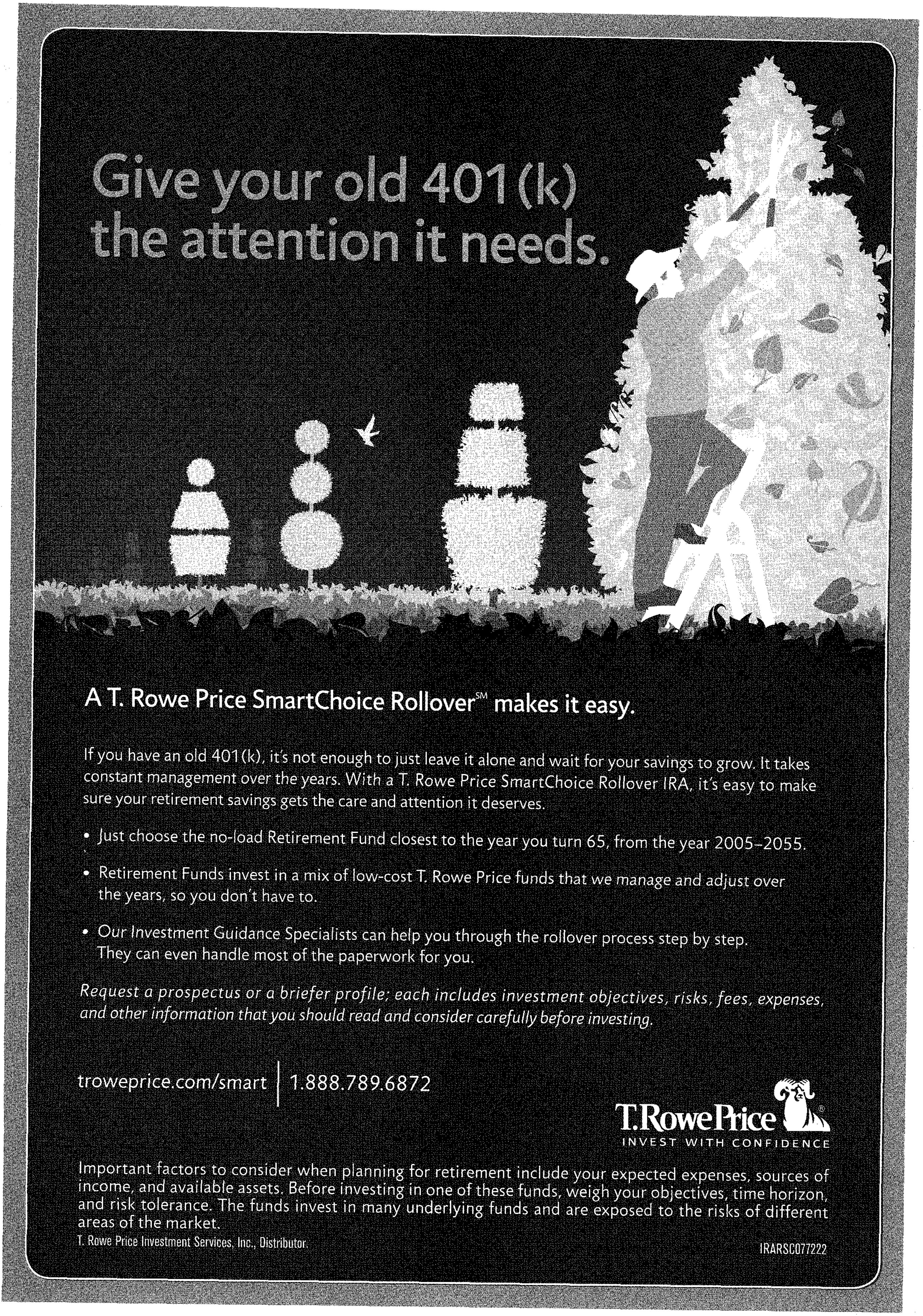

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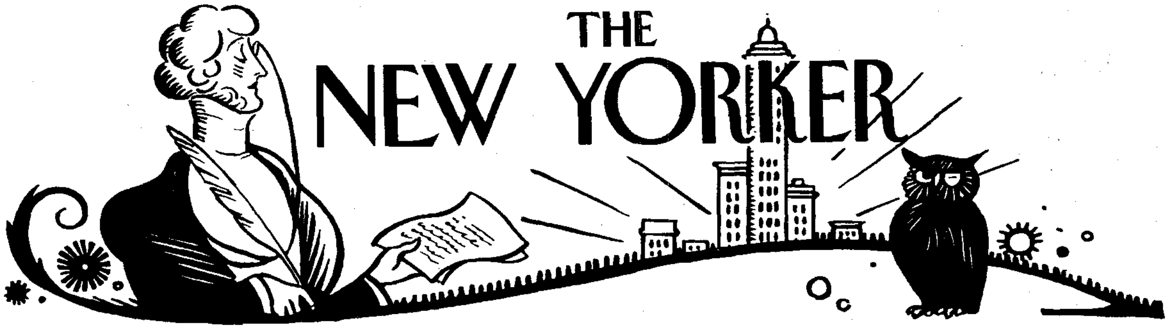


# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## COMMENT
## OVERTAXED

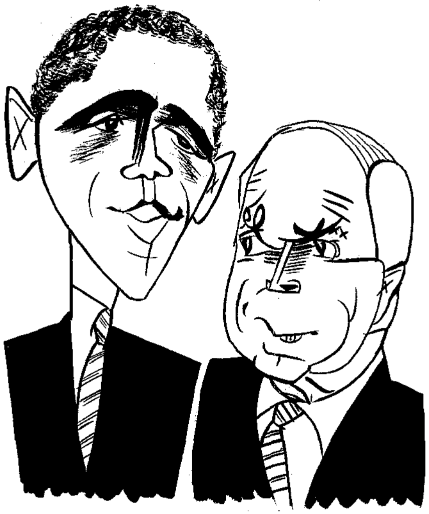
The rise and fall of Joe the Plumber as a symbol of the American self-made man's resistance to progressive taxation began on October 12th, outside Toledo, Ohio. As Senator Barack Obama campaigned for the Presidency in a neighborhood of modest homes, a man named Samuel J. (Joe) Wurzelbacher approached. He said that he was getting ready to buy a company that earned about a quarter of a million dollars a year, and he asked if his taxes would rise under Obama's economic plan. The Senator acknowledged that they might. "Nobody likes high taxes," Obama said. "Of course not." Still, he explained:

> I do believe that for folks like me who've worked hard but frankly also been lucky, I don't mind paying just a little bit more than the waitress who I just met over there. . . . She can barely make the rent. . . . And I think that when you spread the wealth around, it's good for everybody.

The principle that Obama evinced, which most economists would regard as unexceptionable, can be traced to Adam Smith. In "The Wealth of Nations" (1776), his seminal treatise on capitalism, Smith wrote:

> The necessaries of life occasion the great expense of the poor. . . . The luxuries and vanities of life occasion the principal expense of the rich, and a magnificent house embellishes and sets off to the best advantage all the other luxuries and vanities which they possess. . . . It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion.

Smith's notion of reasonableness did not anticipate the Fox News Channel, however. Last Tuesday, Wurzelbacher appeared on that network, where he denounced Obama's comments as "socialist." He said that Obama "scared me," because he "wants to distribute wealth." Wurzelbacher also granted an interview to the advocacy group Family Security Matters, whose advisory board includes the conservative talk-radio hosts Laura Ingraham and Monica Crowley. By means unknown, Joe's story of ambition and resentment reached the campaign of Senator John McCain.

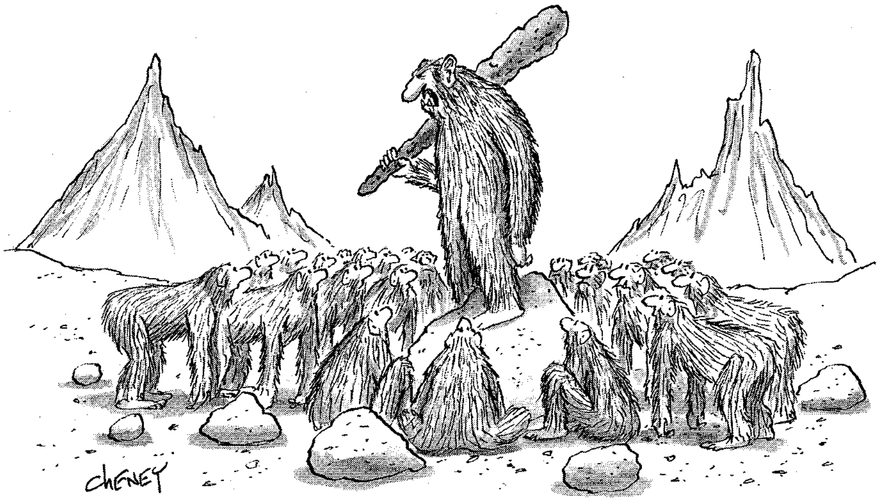


Early in last Wednesday's televised debate, McCain brought up Joe's supposed worries about Obama's proposed tax rates for wealthy Americans and set off one of those cascading episodes of goofiness that sometimes overtake people who are tired. During a prolonged colloquy in which "Joe the Plumber" was invoked more than two dozen times, McCain accused Obama of waging "class warfare." Each office-seeker spoke to Joe, "if you're out there," as if he were a lost child. At one point, McCain referred to Wurzelbacher as "my old buddy Joe, Joe the Plumber," sounding as if he might launch into song.

McCain's reification of Joe's working-class-rooted virtue portended Dreiserian revelations, and, sure enough, reporters quickly discovered that Wurzelbacher was not everything he seemed. He lacked a license to perform plumbing or contracting work; a lien had been filed against him for nonpayment of taxes; and he told Katie Couric, of CBS News, that in truth he is not at present expecting to enter the high tax bracket he had mentioned to Obama. Wurzelbacher's prospects for participating in Sarah Palin's 2012 Joe Six-Pack tour may also have been dented when, speaking to Couric, he described Obama's remarks on tax policy as a "tap dance . . . almost as good as Sammy Davis, Jr."

Of the several morals lurking in this postmodern fable, the least surprising is the reminder that McCain's campaign believes that it cannot afford to be heavily burdened by facts while constructing attacks against Obama's candidacy. Also fa-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



*“My message is simple—vote for me or I’ll eat you.”*

• •

miliar is the example of McCain’s sloppy decision-making. The Ordinary Joe charade was transparently conceived to poke at Obama’s vulnerability with white, independent voters in culturally conservative industrial states. Unfortunately for McCain and his staff, they apparently did not think to vet an important new anecdote that they planned to spring upon a national television audience at a decisive moment of the campaign.

That oversight has rebounded on McCain, of course, but, more important, his phony war on taxes has diminished the last phase of the campaign. In the maw of the worst banking and financial crisis since the Great Depression, McCain has repeatedly dumbed down the debate on economic policy. His focus on pork-barrel spending and the top marginal tax rates of the richest Americans has obscured the seriousness of the crisis, whose causes have nothing to do with either of those issues. Some economists expect the country’s unemployment rate to rise from its current level, of about six per cent, to as high as ten per cent, which would be the highest in a generation; more than a million American families have already had their homes foreclosed upon during the past two years, and in August foreclosure filings reached a record high. McCain, perhaps because he honed his policy instincts during the Reagan era, when marginal tax rates were a big deal, or perhaps because he just doesn’t know what else to talk about, has deflected debate from the difficult, complicated choices that must be made by the next President, such as what sort of economic stimulus plan to enact, and in what stages; which policies might keep the most families in their houses at the least cost; how to restructure market regulation to bring credit-default swaps and other derivatives under government oversight; and how to coördinate global reform of financial and trade imbalances.

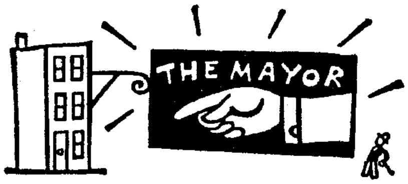
McCain is right in detecting signs of growing class resentment; some of the angry are turning up at McCain-Palin rallies, where the mood has been not so much socialist as national-socialist. The cause of this resentment is not difficult to explain, and it has nothing to do with Obama’s modest tax proposals. Income inequality—the gap between the richest and the rest—increased dramatically during the Bush Administration. The main reason was that the rich became very, very rich, while middle- and working-class families saw their incomes stagnate or decline. Long before the Wall Street meltdown, rising gas prices and health-care bills pinched even those American households with incomes that rank squarely in the middle classes.

That is where the great majority of actual plumbers live, of course; they don’t make a quarter of a million dollars a year. In 2007, their average annual income was forty-seven thousand dollars, and that figure was buoyed by the recent housing boom. The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes an income roll call of other occupations with which McCain, once a modestly paid military officer, has evidently lost touch: kindergarten teachers, $47,750; firefighters, $44,130; roofers, $36,340; dental assistants, $32,280; security guards, $24,480; home health aides, $20,850.

At the very bottom of the income ladder, the inflation-adjusted minimum wage—despite two increases in the past two years—remains essentially the same as it was when George W. Bush took office. That wage amounts to less than fifteen thousand dollars a year, before taxes—and, yes, there are taxes to be paid even at that level. The number of Americans living in poverty has grown by more than five million since 2000. And there’s no way to say that ain’t so.

—*Steve Coll*

## AROUND CITY HALL
## SOME KIND OF SHOW



Ralph Nader came to Cooper Union last week, railing against the corporate “fat cats” and their political allies for continuing to subvert democracy with self-serving back-room deals. “They’re going to throw this city into a very serious recession,” he said, speaking to a crowd of several hundred. “They’re going to deplete tax revenues.” He is running for President, again, but his appearance could have been mistaken for a cameo in the surprise City Hall production that we’ll call “Mayor Richie Rich and the Cosmetics”—to borrow from the nickname that a West Sider named Erik Jacobs gave the Mayor at a public hearing on Thursday—starring Michael Bloomberg and Ronald S. Lauder. One of Nader’s opening acts, the singer Nellie McKay, acknowledged as much when she introduced her third and final number by saying, “If I were mayor, I wouldn’t do three songs, because I’d have term limits.”

So Bloomberg wants to remain in office, having forgone the chance to join Nader as an independent Presidential candidate. He sees Lauder, who reportedly spent four million dollars of his Estée Lauder makeup fortune lobbying for term-limits referenda in 1993 and

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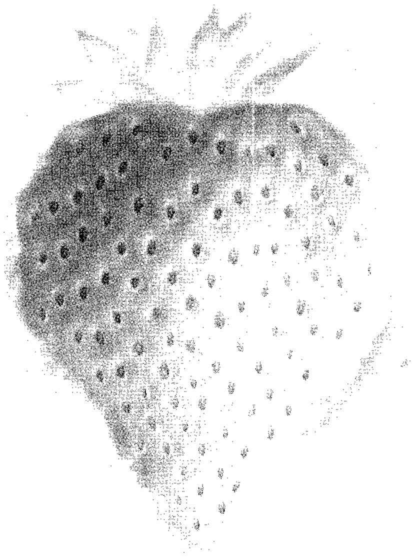

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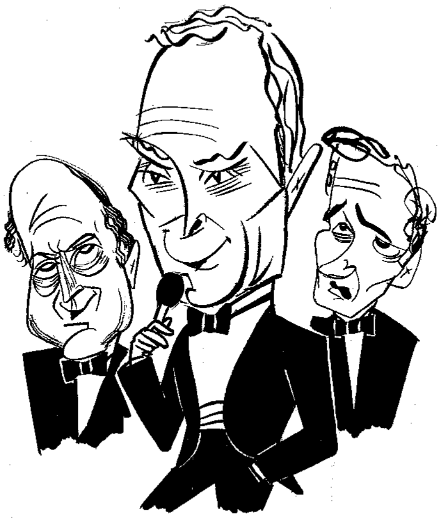
1996, as the chief obstacle, and offers him a deal: a spot on a future charter-revision commission, which would be welcome to undo any damages to democratic precedent, in exchange for his support now, in this financial crisis, in extending the limits by four years. The City Council, whose members stand to benefit from the same extension, agrees to bring the matter to a vote. Enter Anthony Weiner—congressman, erstwhile front-runner in the 2009 mayoral race, and goalie for a middling men's-league ice-hockey team—as a kind of municipal Nader, determined to defend the democratic process from conspiring billionaires, the Mighty Corporate Ducks.

During a conference call with reporters on Wednesday, Weiner said, "We already have an investigation under way of the deal with Ron Lauder," and noted the irony of the Mayor's presence in California, where, alongside Arnold Schwarzenegger, he stumped for a proposition that would prevent that state legislature from redrawing its districts without civilian oversight. "So he's a hypocrite," Adam Lisberg, of the *Daily News*, said, speaking for many New Yorkers who would probably prefer that Bloomberg be given a throne. "So what?"

The billionaire leads, in any event, were not among the hundreds of New Yorkers who turned up at the Council chambers on Thursday and thwarted the best efforts of the Government Operations Committee chairman, Simcha Felder, to prevent "some kind of show" from taking place. First came a parade of political has-beens—Mario Cuomo, Ed Koch, Mark Green—and later a fourteen-year-old member of the Trachtenburg Family Slideshow Singers, who wore a flowery dress and a ribbon in her hair and called Bloomberg the "worst mayor ever," citing the gentrification that had forced the Trachtenburgs to move from the East Village to Bushwick. "Any monkey can raise taxes—no offense to monkeys—but that does not make you a great mayor," she added. James Oddo, one of the officially undecided Council members, actually said, "I've been burning through seven seasons of DVDs of 'The West Wing,' hoping that art can give me a little insight into life," and, as the proceedings stretched into evening, he suggested ordering seventy-five pizzas for everyone, on Lauder's tab. Several hours in, one citizen turned to another and said, "You can't make this stuff up."

Back at Cooper Union, the theme of the week was reinforced when one of Nader's deputies took the stage and offered a signed, fortieth-anniversary edition of "Unsafe at Any Speed" to the first audience member willing to pledge the maximum amount of twenty-three hundred dollars, on the spot, to the campaign. "You can put it on a credit card and pay it off over time," he said, eliciting laughter. "Is there one person able and willing to be a hero tonight?" Finally, a hand went up near the front, to great applause. Then the would-be donor, a man in a beige sports coat, stood and morphed into a meddling tycoon. "One caveat," he said. "I would like to be able to speak with Mr. Nader for a moment or two and ask him a couple of questions."


*Ronald Lauder, Mayor Bloomberg, Ralph Nader*

"We can do that," came the reply, and money married influence.

*—Ben McGrath*

## LOSSES DEPT.
## BEEN THERE

If there is a typical way to look after you lose two billion seven hundred million dollars in the stock market, that's pretty much the expression on Hank Greenberg's face these days. Greenberg served for thirty-seven years as the chief executive of American International Group, which he turned into one of the biggest insurance companies in the world. Three years ago, he was forced out, amid accusations of fraud at the company, by the New York Attorney General at the time, Eliot Spitzer. Then, last month, as the financial crisis accelerated, Greenberg, still A.I.G.'s biggest individual shareholder, watched helplessly as the company had to be bailed out by the federal government. Thus, his ten-figure hit.

And that expression? Mostly wistful, with an unmistakable undercurrent of rage and a tiny bit of amusement at the scale of the disaster that befell his company after he was forced out. "It's not a very pleasant feeling," he said the other day, with a quarter smile. Compact and fit at eighty-three—he still plays tennis and skis—Greenberg, in a well-tailored white shirt bearing the monogram "M.R.G.," for the seldom used "Maurice R.," sat bolt upright. He looked only a few pounds over his weight in the Second World War, when, as an infantryman, he stormed the beaches in the Normandy invasion and, later, was among those who liberated the concentration camp at Dachau. Though banished from A.I.G., Greenberg still rates a corner office on Park Avenue, where he presides over C. V. Starr & Company, a separate insurance concern that controls a substantial amount of A.I.G. stock. (Cornelius Vander Starr, whose bronze bust looms near the elevators, created, in 1919, a series of companies that became A.I.G.)

"I don't want to go back and run the company—been there, done that," Greenberg said of A.I.G., but he remains intimately involved as a bereaved shareholder. His personal stake in the company now stands at about a hundred million dollars. Last week, he was lobbying both the company and the federal government to change the terms of the bailout. A.I.G., basically, had to go begging for cash because of the collapse of its London-based financial-products division, whose large credit-default-swap business prompted losses far in excess of the unit's relatively small part of the overall company. "A.I.G. had a liquidity problem, not a solvency problem," Greenberg said. "The insurance business is quite good. It's still operating in a hundred and thirty countries around the world, but, to pay off the loan from the government, the company is going to have to sell assets—at a time when they are not going to get the best prices. The more assets you sell at prices that are not fair value, the more jobs you lose, the more pensions and 401(k)s lose enormous amounts of money. And the taxpayers will not get all their money back anyway. Nobody wins."

Instead, Greenberg is proposing that the government invest in A.I.G. on terms similar to those which were arranged with the nation's banks. "There'd be no need to sell all the assets, and taxpayers would have a better chance of getting their money back," he said. But, as of last week, Greenberg's idea had gained little traction in New York or Washington. "I'm just a shareholder, so I can't force anyone to listen," he said. His fury at his successors at A.I.G. is muted but clear. "I do not believe if I had been there we would have had the same result," he said. "I don't know what happened to risk management after we left, why they didn't hedge the portfolio. It just seems to me there were other ways this could have turned out."

The seeming reluctance of Greenberg's successors at A.I.G. to listen to him may be understandable. His legal problems endure. The civil suit against him filed by the New York Attorney General's office remains pending, the Securities and Exchange Commission is still investigating him, and the Justice Department recently obtained a conviction of one of his former subordinates in a criminal case, in Connecticut, in which Greenberg was named an unindicted co-conspirator. When the interests of his company were flung so far around the world, Greenberg cultivated political leaders at home and abroad; his office features personally inscribed photographs of Presidents starting with Harry S. Truman. In the current election, he's supporting John McCain, largely because of the Arizonan's support for the war in Iraq. Greenberg's reasons might well serve as his credo. "I don't think you tell the enemy when you are going to leave," he said. "It's painful and expensive, but we're committed." And how does he think McCain's campaign is going? "Badly," he said.

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

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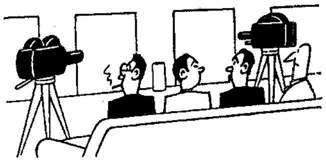
## HOME MOVIES
## SHTARKERS



On a recent Sunday, members of an extended Jewish clan, most of them Brooklyn-born, gathered at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, in lower Manhattan, to watch a movie about their family. The movie was not a compilation of old wedding films or aging, ketchup-tinted bar-mitzvah footage but a screening of Edward Zwick's new feature, "Defiance," which opens in December. The film is still a family film, though, since it tells the largely unknown and entirely true story of the Bielski brothers' brigade: of how Tuvia, Zus, and Asael Bielski fled from Poland into the Belarusian forest in 1941—after the *Einsatzgruppen* had begun the mass slaughter of Jews that marked the first phase of the Holocaust—and managed not only to hold off the German Army, in grudging compact with Russian partisans, but to recruit Jewish civilians and keep them concealed for three years in the forest. By the end, almost twelve hundred Jews were living in the Belarusian woods, in a series of encampments that included libraries, nurseries, and clinics. The story, very well played by Daniel Craig (everyone's favorite non-Jewish Jew), as Tuvia, and Liev Schreiber, as his angrier younger brother Zus, is stirring—"Every day of freedom is an act of faith," Tuvia tells the demoralized band on the forest floor—and stops short on a mildly hallucinatory note: a title card at the end explains that the two surviving Bielski brothers (Asael died in the war) eventually emigrated to Brooklyn, where for decades they worked as cab owners and truck drivers, a small nest of heroes in the middle of Midwood. (Zwick had originally considered starting the film there, with a scene of a customer finding himself in the back seat of a taxi and realizing that he was being driven by a Bielski, as one might be driven down Broadway by a Maccabee.)

Though both Zus and Tuvia have been dead for more than a decade, the remaining Bielski relatives were there for the screening—drifting down, like every Jewish family in New York, from older Sadies and Izzys to younger generations of Courtneys and Chloes. The central enigma of the movie, as Zwick said in a prescreening speech, is the moral source of unexampled heroism: what made the Bielskis act so bravely at a time when everyone else was helpless or in despair? One look at the surviving Bielskis helped explain a good deal that metaphysics could not: the second and third generations of the Bielski men are, as their fathers must have been, what are technically called *shtarkers:* a Yiddish word meaning extremely tough guys. Beetle-browed and wide of body, raspy of voice, direct of gaze, the Bielski men strained the shoulders of their sports coats as they filed into the theatre.

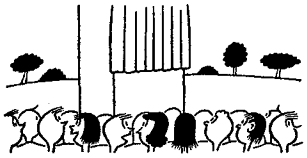
The family split neatly into thirds, each clan rooting lustily for its ancestor as the doubles did their bits onscreen, and afterward adjourned to a buffet upstairs, where they reminisced about what their fathers had done and why they had done it. Robert Bielski, Tuvia's son, recalled that his father was a man of few words and strong principle: "He was proud, and he never talked about himself as a hero but always about the responsibility that we should all feel to the Jewish people. He was the calmest man, but he had a rare temper. If he was on the verge of losing it, you knew—abandon ship!" Asaela Bielski, Asael's daughter, who never got to meet her father, had come from Israel, where she works as a journalist. "The strange thing is that my mother had such beautiful memories of their time in the forest, maybe because that was the only time they were together," she said. "They had grown up right there. My mother's stories were always funny, romantic—about how young and beautiful everyone was. And it would always be funny—they would laugh endlessly, say, when a German airplane dropped a bomb in the wrong place. Is that tragic or funny? I don't know."

Zvi Bielski, Zus's son, has a lot of memories. "My father was a very, very aggressive person, but he never hit me," he said. He described walking in Central Park once with his father, then in his sixties, and coming upon a mounted police officer whose horse was acting up. "My father just approached the horse, which was bucking wildly—the cop was embarrassed—and my dad just calmed it down. That's how gentle he was."

He went on, "My dad came to visit me in Israel when I was in the Army. First he told me not to go—but when he came to visit he was so proud. He took the gun out of my hands, handled it like a pair of sneakers. 'Never have your gun on safety,' he told me. He was a great father, but he was hard to impress. I used to skydive, and once I had a videotape made—a cameraman jumped out with me. I couldn't wait to get to Brooklyn to show it to Dad! So I showed him the tape. Nothing, no expression. So, finally, I say, 'Pop, did you see that shit!' He looked at me: 'So? You had a parachute, didn't you?' "

*—Adam Gopnik*

## THE BOARDS
### TEEN SPIRIT



The other Friday evening, a couple of Broadway stars were on the second floor of Sardi's ordering pre-curtain cocktails. "I'll have a virgin strawberry Daiquiri," the leading lady was saying.

"A virgin piña colada?" the leading man said.

The show is "13," a new musical, at the Bernard B. Jacobs, about the horrors of adolescence. Graham Phillips, a squinty fifteen-year-old in a cardigan and a tie—who took his piña colada with camomile tea—plays a Manhattan teen-ager who is forced to relocate to Indiana ("Noooooooo!") after his parents separate. The entire cast is below voting age, not to mention Martini age. Still, Phillips gulped down his cocktail in a matter of seconds. "If it wasn't for the brain freeze, I'd be having another," he said.

Phillips, a Laguna Beach transplant, was dining out with three of his co-stars: Allie Trimm, a sandy-haired thirteen-year-old from San Diego; Delaney Moro, a Westchester girl and, at thirteen, the Broadway veteran, having played Jane Banks in "Mary Poppins"; and Aaron Simon Gross, the theatre buff—fourteen years old, a Boca Ratoner, loved "August: Osage County." Everyone ordered spaghetti.

Life between performances, they said, had been fast-paced: exploring the subways "without our parents," cycling through Central Park (exactly thirteen miles on a day off). They'd even held a pizza party with their across-the-street neighbors, the kids of "Billy Elliot." "I swear I was going to step on one of them," Moro said. "They were so small."

"They may have looked small," Phillips said, "but I thought they were going to be, like, 'Hey, can I have a beer?' "

"They're, like, seven going on seventy-four," Moro said.

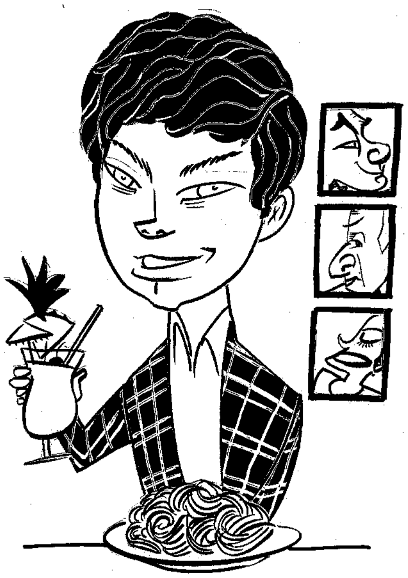
All in all, the "13" kids seemed to be riding out their awkward years on a showbiz cloud, though they acknowledged that the age has its pitfalls. When asked to name the worst part of being thirteen, Moro was unhesitating: "Boys." Phillips took a more reflective approach. "I'd say it's just getting labelled as something you're not," he said. "It's actually a really important age. It's when you develop the person that you're going to be for the rest of your life." He remembered his thirteenth year fondly; he'd landed a role in the movie "Evan Almighty" and sang on the Meat Loaf album "Bat Out of Hell III"—"back when I could sing boy soprano." Gross said that his biggest hurdle had been practicing for his bar mitzvah. "I had the longest haftarah and the second-longest Torah portion," he said.

Being in "13," Moro explained, has made being thirteen a lot easier. "We're so distracted from everything," she said. "Personally, I had a lot going on before. I moved and my parents split up, right before the show started happening, in July. That all doesn't come to my mind anymore." She added, "Our child wranglers are really easy to talk to." (The show employs three on-site guardians.)

At that point, the kids noticed a black car pulling up to "Equus," across the street. A bloated figure with white hair and a cane emerged and started hobbling to the stage door. "Richard Griffiths!" one of them yelled.

"Where? Where?" Gross said. He took out his camera phone and leaned across the table. "I saw him in 'The History Boys' and was, like, Oh, my God."

No mention of Harry Potter—clearly, this was a sophisticated crowd. But could they stack up against the average Sardi's barfly in identifying the stars depicted in the restaurant's famous caricatures? Gross went first, pointing out Norbert Leo Butz on a nearby wall. "Is that Sally Struthers?" Phillips said. (Correct.) "I did 'Mame' with her. She was Gooch. She was the best Gooch I've ever seen in my life."



*Graham Phillips*

Trimm successfully picked out David Hasselhoff, but was stumped by a portrait of Gene Nelson. "He looks like a Who from Whoville," she observed.

The kids spilled down the stairs and circulated around the main floor, calling out names. ("Lucille Ball!" "Joel Grey!" "Rafiki!") Gross was on a roll. "Thomas Meehan!" he said. "I sat next to him at a show." A waiter squeezed by, looking perplexed.

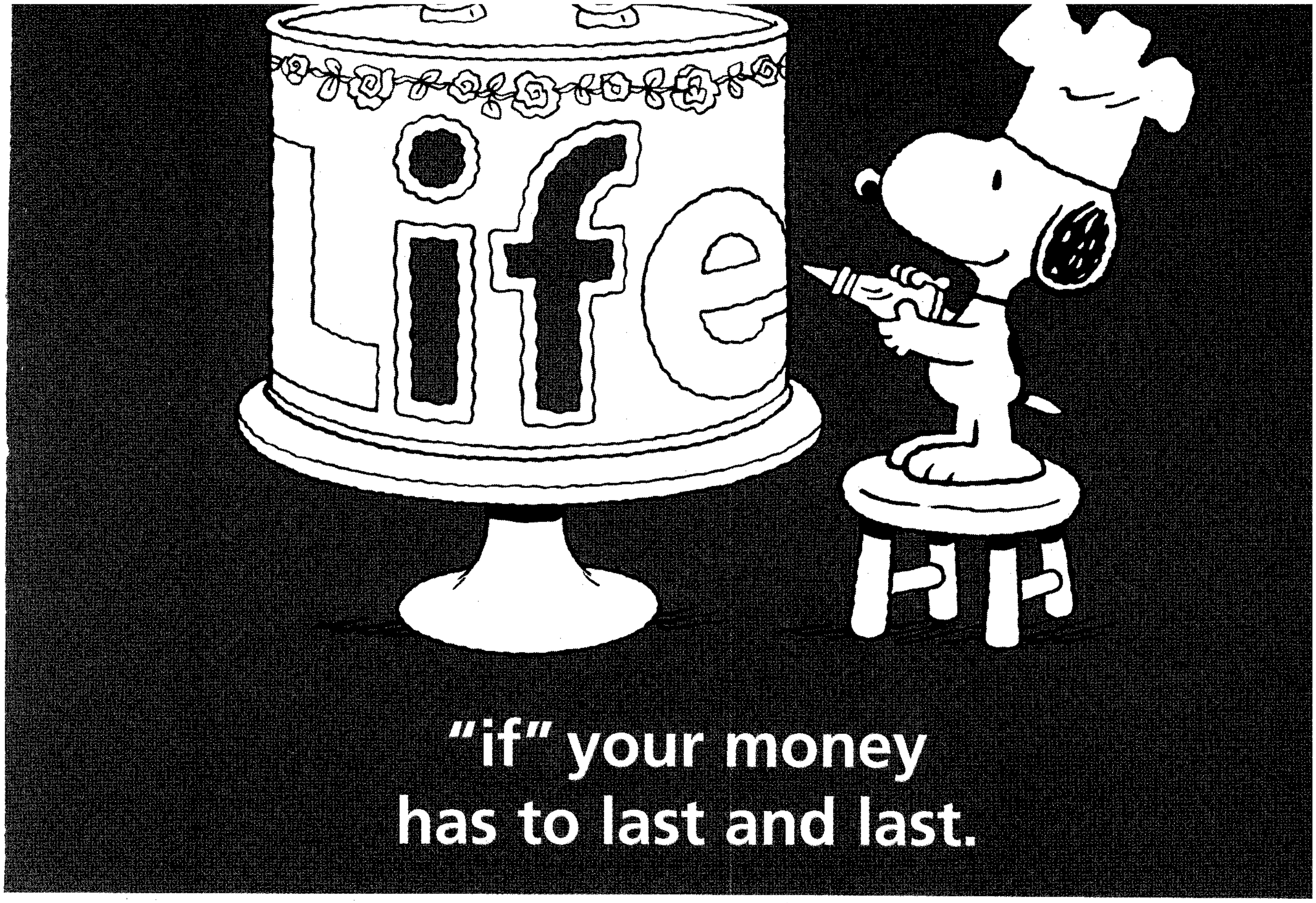
"Susan Stroman!"

"Matthew Broderick!"

"Rue McWhatserface!"

Trimm shrieked. "Bebe Neuwirth!" She climbed over a pair of pre-theatre diners, snapped a picture with her camera phone, and read off the inscription: "Ooh, I love my life." From one Broadway baby to another.

*—Michael Schulman*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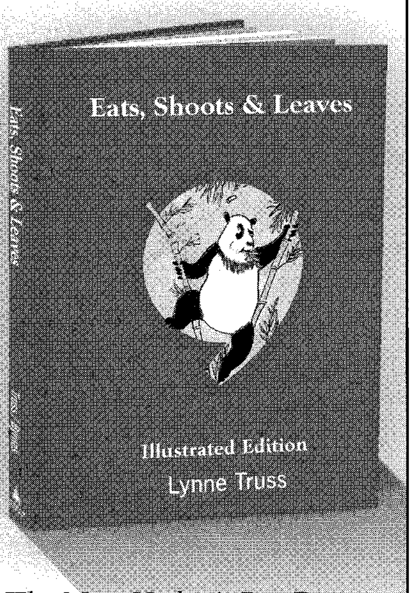

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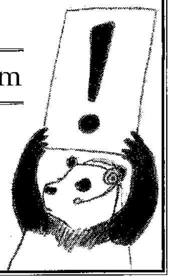


THE POLITICAL SCENE

# THE INSIDERS

*How John McCain came to pick Sarah Palin.*

BY JANE MAYER

"Here's a little news flash," Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska and the Republican candidate for Vice-President, announced in September, during her début at the Party's Convention, in St. Paul. "I'm not a member of the permanent political establishment. And I've learned quickly these past few days that if you're not a member in good standing of the Washington élite then some in the media consider a candidate unqualified for that reason alone." But, she added, "I'm not going to Washington to seek their good opinion."

In subsequent speeches, Palin has cast herself as an antidote to the élitist culture inside the Beltway. "I'm certainly a Washington outsider, and I'm proud of that, because I think that that is what we need," she recently told Fox News. During her first interview as John McCain's running mate, with ABC's Charlie Gibson, Palin was asked about her lack of experience in foreign policy. She replied, "We've got to remember what the desire is in this nation at this time. It is for no more politics as usual, and somebody's big fat résumé, maybe, that shows decades and decades in the Washington establishment . . . Americans are getting sick and tired of that self-dealing, and kind of that closed-door, good-ol'-boy network that has been the Washington élite."

Palin's sudden rise to prominence, however, owes more to members of the Washington élite than her rhetoric has suggested. Paulette Simpson, the head of the Alaska Federation of Republican Women, who has known Palin since 2002, said, "From the beginning, she's been underestimated. She's very smart. She's ambitious." John Bitney, a top policy adviser on Palin's 2006 gubernatorial campaign, said, "Sarah's very conscientious about crafting the story of Sarah. She's all about the hockey mom and Mrs. Palin Goes to Washington—the anti-politician politician." Bitney is from Wasilla, Palin's home town, and has known her since junior high school, where they both played in the band. He considers Palin a friend, even though after becoming governor, in December, 2006, she dismissed him. He is now the chief of staff to the speaker of the Alaska House.

Upon being elected governor, Palin began developing relationships with Washington insiders, who later championed the idea of putting her on the 2008 ticket. "There's some political opportunism on her part," Bitney said. For years, "she's had D.C. in mind." He added, "She's not interested in being on the junior-varsity team."

During her gubernatorial campaign, Bitney said, he began predicting to Palin that she would make the short list of Republican Vice-Presidential prospects. "She had the biography, I told her, to be a contender," he recalled. At first, Palin only laughed. But within a few months of being sworn in she and others in her circle noticed that a blogger named Adam Brickley had started a movement to draft her as Vice-President. Palin also learned that a number of prominent conservative pundits would soon be passing through Juneau, on cruises sponsored by right-leaning political magazines. She invited these insiders to the governor's mansion, and even led some of them on a helicopter tour.

Throughout the campaign, Palin has mocked what she calls "the mainstream media." Yet her administration made a concerted effort to attract the attention of East Coast publications. In late 2007, the state hired a public-relations firm with strong East Coast connections, which began promoting Palin and a natural-gas pipeline that she was backing in Alaska. The contract was for thirty-seven thousand dollars. The publicist on the project, Marcia Brier, the head of MCB Communications, in Needham, Massachusetts, was asked to approach media outlets in Washington and New York, according to the Washington *Post*. "I believe Alaska has a very small press organization," Brier told me. "They hired an outside consultant in order to get that East Coast press." Brier crafted a campaign depicting Palin as bravely taking on powerful oil interests by choosing a Canadian firm, TransCanada, rather than an American conglomerate such as ExxonMobil, to build the pipeline. ("Big Oil Under Siege" was the title of a typical press release.) Brier pitched Palin to publications such as the *Times*, the Washington *Post*, and *Fortune*.

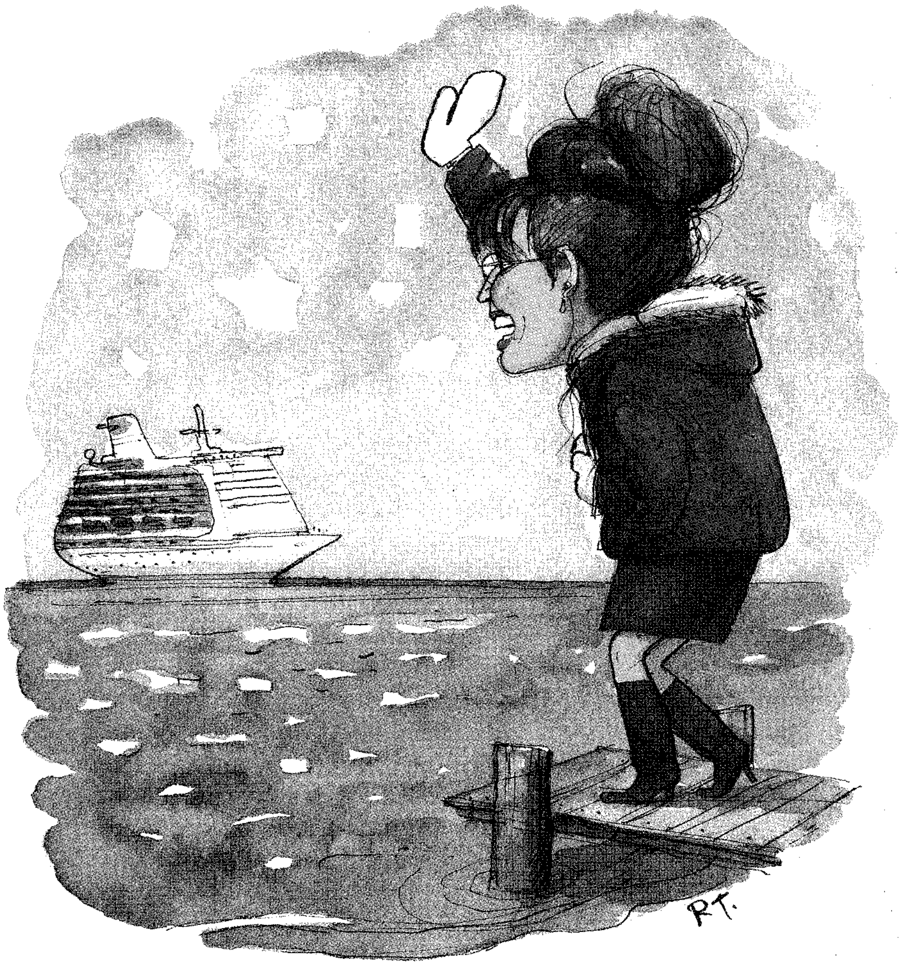
From the start of her political career, Palin has positioned herself as an insurgent intent on dislodging entrenched interests. In 1996, a campaign pamphlet for her first mayoral run—recently obtained by *The New Republic*—strikes the same note of populist resentment that Palin did at the Convention: "I'm tired of 'business as usual' in this town, and of the 'Good Ol' Boys' network that runs the show here." Yet Palin has routinely turned to members of Washington's Old Guard for help. After she became the mayor of Wasilla, Palin oversaw the hiring of a law firm to represent the town's interests in Washington, D.C. The Wasilla account was handled by Steven Silver, a Washington-area lobbyist who had been the chief of staff to Alaska's long-serving Republican senator Ted Stevens, who was indicted in July on charges of accepting illegal gifts and is now standing trial. (Silver declined to discuss his ties to Palin.) As the Washington *Post* reported, Silver's efforts in the capital helped Wasilla, a town of sixty-seven hundred residents, secure twenty-seven million dollars in federal earmarks. During this election season, however, Palin has presented herself as more abstemious, saying, "I've championed reform to end the abuses of earmark spending by Congress."

In February, 2007, Adam Brickley gave himself a mission: he began searching for a running mate for McCain who could halt the momentum of the Democrats. Brickley, a self-described "obsessive" political junkie who recently graduated from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, told me that he began by "randomly searching Wikipedia and election sites for Republican women." Though he generally opposes affirmative action, gender drove his choice. "People were talking about Hillary at the time," he recalled. Brickley said that he "puzzled over every Republican female politician I knew." Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, of Texas, "waffled on social issues"; Senator Olympia Snowe, of Maine, was too moderate. He was running out of options, he recalled, when he said to himself, "What about that lady who just got elected in Alaska?" Online research revealed that she had a strong grassroots following; as Brickley put it, "I hate to use the words 'cult of personality,' but she reminded me of Obama."

Brickley registered a Web site—palinforvp.blogspot.com—which began getting attention in the conservative blogosphere. In the month before Palin was picked by McCain, Brickley said, his Web site was receiving about three thousand hits a day. Support for Palin had spread from one right-of-center Internet site to the next. First, the popular conservative blogger InstaPundit mentioned Brickley's campaign. Then a site called the American Scene said that Palin was "very appealing"; another, Stop the A.C.L.U., described her as "a great choice." The traditional conservative media soon got in on the act: *The American Spectator* embraced Palin, and Rush Limbaugh, the radio host, praised her as "a babe."

Brickley's family, once evangelical Christians, now practice what he calls "Messianic Judaism." They believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they also observe the Jewish holidays and attend synagogue; as Brickley puts it, "Jesus was Jewish, so to be like Him you need to be Jewish, too." Brickley said that "the hand of God" played a role in choosing Palin: "The longer I worked on it the less I felt I was driving it. Something else was at work."

Brickley is an authentic heartland voice, but he is also the product of an effort by wealthy conservative organizations in Washington to train activists. He has attended several workshops sponsored by the Leadership Institute, a group based in the Washington area and founded in 1979 by the Christian conservative activist Morton Blackwell. "I'm building a movement," Blackwell told



*In 2007, Palin entertained top conservative pundits at the governor's mansion.*

RICHARD THOMPSON

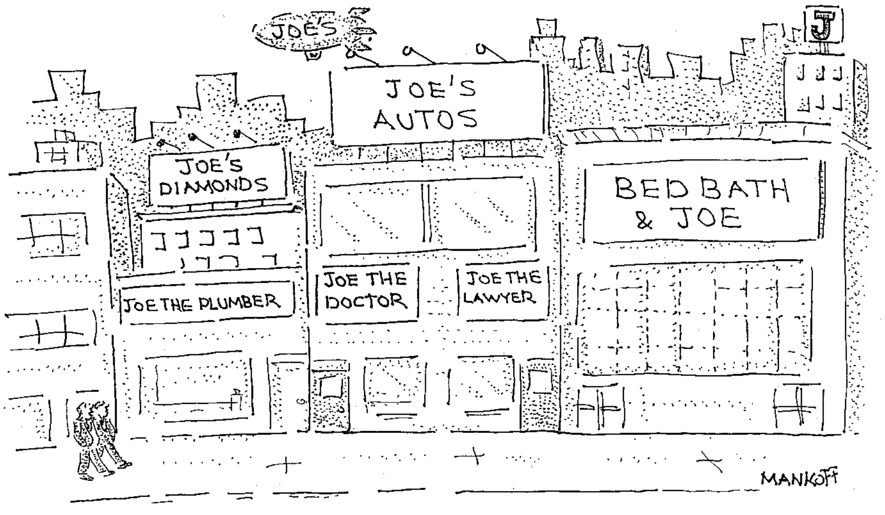
me. Brickley also participated in a leadership summit held by Young America's Foundation (motto: "The Conservative Movement Starts Here") and was an intern at the Heritage Foundation. He currently lives in a dormitory, on Capitol Hill, run by the Heritage Foundation, and is an intern with townhall.com, a top conservative Web site.

While Brickley and others were spreading the word about Palin on the Internet, Palin was wooing a number of well-connected Washington conservative thinkers. In a stroke of luck, Palin did not have to go to the capital to meet these members of "the permanent political establishment"; they came to Alaska. Shortly after taking office, Palin received two memos from Paulette Simpson, the Alaska Federation of Republican Women leader, noting that two prominent conservative magazines—*The Weekly Standard*, owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, and *National Review*, founded by William F. Buckley, Jr.—were planning luxury cruises to Alaska in the summer of 2007, which would make stops in Juneau. Writers and editors from these publications had been enlisted to deliver lectures to politically minded vacationers. "The Governor was more than happy to meet these guys," Joe Balash, a special staff assistant to Palin, recalled.

On June 18, 2007, the first group disembarked in Juneau from the Holland America Line's M.S. Oosterdam, and went to the governor's mansion, a white wooden Colonial house with six two-story columns, for lunch. The contingent featured three of *The Weekly Standard's* top writers: William Kristol, the magazine's Washington-based editor, who is also an Op-Ed columnist for the *Times* and a regular commentator on "Fox News Sunday"; Fred Barnes, the magazine's executive editor and the co-host of "The Beltway Boys," a political talk show on Fox News; and Michael Gerson, the former chief speechwriter for President Bush and a Washington *Post* columnist.

By all accounts, the luncheon was a high-spirited, informal occasion. Kristol brought his wife and daughter; Gerson brought his wife and two children. Barnes, who brought his sister and his wife, sat on one side of Governor Palin, who presided at the head of the long table in the mansion's formal dining room; the Kristols sat on the other. Gerson was at the opposite end, as was Palin's chief of staff at the time, Mike Tibbles, who is now working for Senator Stevens's reëlection campaign. The menu featured halibut cheeks—the choicest part of the fish. Before the meal, Palin delivered a lengthy grace. Simpson, who was at the luncheon, said, "I told a girlfriend afterwards, 'That was *some* grace!' It really set the tone." Joe Balash, Palin's assistant, who was also present, said, "There are not many politicians who will say grace with the conviction of faith she has. It's a daily part of her life."

Palin was joined by her lieutenant governor and by Alaska's attorney general. Also present was a local woman involved in upholding the Juneau school system's right to suspend a student who had displayed a satirical banner—"Bong Hits 4 Jesus"—across the street from his school. The student had sued the school district, on First Amendment grounds, and, at the time of the lunch, the case was before the Supreme Court. (The school district won.)



*"You know, maybe he's not the small-business man he claims to be."*

During the lunch, everyone was charmed when the Governor's small daughter Piper popped in to inquire about dessert. Fred Barnes recalled being "struck by how smart Palin was, and how unusually confident. Maybe because she had been a beauty queen, and a star athlete, and succeeded at almost everything she had done." It didn't escape his notice, too, that she was "exceptionally pretty."

According to a former Alaska official who attended the lunch, the visitors wanted to do something "touristy," so a "flightseeing" trip was arranged. Their destination was a gold mine in Berners Bay, some forty-five miles north of Juneau. For Palin and several staff members, the state leased two helicopters from a private company, Coastal, for two and a half hours, at a cost of four thousand dollars. (The pundits paid for their own aircraft.) Palin explained that environmentalists had invoked the Clean Water Act to oppose a plan by a mining company, Coeur Alaska, to dump waste from the extraction of gold into a pristine lake in the Tongass National Forest. Palin rejected the environmentalists' claims. (The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Coeur Alaska, and the dispute is now before the Supreme Court.) Barnes was dazzled by Palin's handling of the hundred or so mineworkers who gathered to meet the group. "She clearly was not intimidated by crowds—or men!" he said. "She's got real star quality."

By the time the *Weekly Standard* pundits returned to the cruise ship, Paulette Simpson said, "they were very enamored of her." In July, 2007, Barnes wrote the first major national article spotlighting Palin, titled "The Most Popular Governor," for *The Weekly Standard*. Simpson said, "That first article was the result of having lunch." Bitney agreed: "I don't think she realized the significance until after it was all over. It got the ball rolling."

The other journalists who met Palin offered similarly effusive praise: Michael Gerson called her "a mix between Annie Oakley and Joan of Arc." The most ardent promoter, however, was Kristol, and his enthusiasm became the talk of Alaska's political circles. According to Simpson, Senator Stevens told her that "Kristol was really pushing Palin" in Washington before McCain picked her. Indeed, as early as June 29th, two months before McCain chose her, Kristol predicted on "Fox News Sunday" that "McCain's going to put Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska, on the ticket." He described her as "fantastic," saying that she could go one-on-one against Obama in basketball, and possibly siphon off Hillary Clinton's supporters. He pointed out that she was a "mother of five" and a reformer. "Go for the gold here with Sarah Palin," he said. The moderator, Chris Wallace, finally had to ask Kristol, "Can we please get off Sarah Palin?"

The next day, however, Kristol was still talking about Palin on Fox. "She could be both an effective Vice-Presidential candidate and an effective President," he said. "She's young, energetic." On a subsequent "Fox News Sunday," Kristol again pushed Palin when asked whom McCain should pick: "Sarah Palin, whom I've only met once but I was awfully impressed by—a genuine reformer, defeated the establishment up there. It would be pretty wild to pick a young female Alaska governor, and I think, you know, McCain might as well go for it." On July 22nd, again on Fox, Kristol referred to Palin as "my heartthrob." He declared, "I don't know if I can make it through the next three months without her on the ticket." Reached last week, Kristol pointed out that just before McCain picked Palin he had ratcheted back his campaign a little; though he continued to tout her, he also wrote a *Times* column promoting Senator Joe Lieberman, of Connecticut.

On October 6th, in another *Times* column, Kristol cryptically acknowledged having been entertained by the Governor. He mentioned meeting Palin "in far more relaxed circumstances, in Alaska over a year ago." The column featured one of the few interviews that Palin has granted to the national media since becoming McCain's running mate. Kristol quoted Palin saying that the debate had been a "liberating" experience, then wrote, "Shouldn't the public get the benefit of another Biden-Palin debate, or even two? If there's difficulty finding a moderator, I'll be glad to volunteer."

On August 1, 2007, a few weeks after the *Weekly Standard* cruise departed from Juneau, Palin hosted a second boatload of pundits, this time from a cruise featuring associates of *National Review*. Her guests, arriving on the M.S. Noordam, included Rich Lowry, the magazine's editor and a syndicated columnist; Robert Bork, the conservative legal scholar and former federal judge; John Bolton, who served as the Bush Administration's Ambassador to the United Nations from 2004 to 2006; Victor Davis Hanson, a conservative historian who is reportedly a favorite of Vice-President Dick Cheney; and Dick Morris, the ideologically ambidextrous political consultant, who writes a column for *The Hill* and appears regularly on Fox News.

As Jack Fowler, *National Review's* publisher, recalled it, when the guest speakers were invited to come to a special reception at the governor's mansion, "We said, 'Sure!' There's only so much you can do in Juneau." The mansion itself, he said, was modest—"not exactly Newport." But the food was great, and included an impressive spread of salmon. Palin, who circulated nimbly through the room, and spoke admiringly of *National Review*, made a good impression. Fowler said, "This lady is something special. She connects. She's genuine. She doesn't look like what you'd expect. My thought was, Too bad she's way up there in Alaska, because she has potential, but to make things happen you have to know people."

Hanson, the historian, recalled Palin in high heels, "walking around this big Victorian house with rough Alaska floors, saying, 'Hi, I'm Sarah.' " She was "striking," he said. "She has that aura that Clinton, Reagan, and Jack Kennedy had—magnetism that comes through much more strongly when you're in the same room." He was delighted that Palin described herself as a fan of history, and as a reader of *National Review's* Web site, for which he writes regularly. She spoke about the need to drill for oil in Alaska's protected wilderness areas, arguing that her husband had worked in nearby oil fields and knew firsthand that it wasn't environmentally hazardous. Hanson, a farm owner, found it appealing that she was married to an oil worker, rather than to an executive. Bolton, for his part, was pleased that Palin, a hunting enthusiast, was familiar with his efforts to stave off international controls on the global flow of small weapons. She spoke knowledgeably about missile defense, too, he said, and discussed his role, in 2001, in guiding the Bush Administration's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Jay Nordlinger, a senior editor at *National Review*, had a more elemental response. In an online column, he described Palin as "a former beauty-pageant contestant, and a real honey, too. Am I allowed to say that? Probably not, but too bad."

According to several accounts, however, no connection made that day was more meaningful than the one struck between Palin and Dick Morris. "He had this *very* long conversation with her," Fowler recalled. Lowry laughed in remembering it: "The joke going around was that he was going to take credit for making her." (Nordlinger's column went on to say, "Her political career will probably take her beyond Alaska. Dick Morris is only one who thinks so.")

In fact, in an admiring column published in the Washington *Post* two days after Palin was chosen, Morris wrote, "I will always remember taking her aside and telling her that she might one day be tapped to be Vice-President, given her record and the shortage of female political talent in the Republican Party. She will make one hell of a candidate, and hats off to McCain for picking her."

Morris offered Palin some advice during their encounter in Juneau, several of those present recollected, which he shared with the rest of the gathering in a short speech. As Lowry recalled it, Morris had warned her that a reformer, in order to be successful, needed to maintain her "outsider cred." In a similar vein, Simpson recalled that Morris "gave a little speech" in which he warned that "what happens to most people is that they campaign as outsiders, but when they get into power they turn into insiders. If you want to be successful, you have to stay an outsider."

Clearly, Palin has taken this advice to heart. Still, when the moment came for Morris and other guests to depart, Palin was sad to see the Washington insiders go. Hanson recalled, "She said, 'Hey—does anyone want to stay for dinner? We're going to eat right now.' She also invited everyone to come back the next day. 'If any of you are in the area, all you have to do is knock. Yell upstairs, I'll be right down.' "

By the end of February, 2008, the chorus of conservative pundits for Palin was loud enough for the mainstream media to take note. Chris Cillizza, reporting for the Web site of the Washington *Post*, interviewed Palin and asked her if she'd accept an offer to be McCain's running mate. Though she dismissed the notion as a virtual "impossibility this go-round," Palin, who had been in office for only fourteen months, said, "Is it generally something that I would want to consider? Yes."

By the spring, the McCain campaign had reportedly sent scouts to Alaska to start vetting Palin as a possible running mate. A week or so before McCain named her, however, sources close to the campaign say, McCain was intent on naming his fellow-senator Joe Lieberman, an independent, who left the Democratic Party in 2006. David Keene, the chairman of the American Conservative Union, who is close to a number of McCain's top aides, told me that "McCain and Lindsey Graham"—the South Carolina senator, who has been McCain's closest campaign companion—"really wanted Joe." But Keene believed that "McCain was scared off" in the final days, after warnings from his advisers that choosing Lieberman would ignite a contentious floor fight at the Convention, as social conservatives revolted against Lieberman for being, among other things, pro-choice.

"They took it away from him," a longtime friend of McCain—who asked not to be identified, since the campaign has declined to discuss its selection process—said of the advisers. "He was furious. He was pissed. It wasn't what he wanted." Another friend disputed this, characterizing McCain's mood as one of "understanding resignation."

With just days to go before the Convention, the choices were slim. Karl Rove favored McCain's former rival Mitt Romney, but enough animus lingered from the primaries that McCain rejected the pairing. "I told Romney not to wait by the phone, because 'he doesn't like you,' " Keene, who favored the choice, said. "With John McCain, all politics is personal." Other possible choices—such as former Representative Rob Portman, of Ohio, or Governor Tim Pawlenty, of Minnesota—seemed too conventional. They did not transmit McCain's core message that he was a "maverick." Finally, McCain's top aides, including Steve Schmidt and Rick Davis, converged on Palin. Ed Rogers, the chairman of B.G.R., a well-connected, largely Republican lobbying firm, said, "Her criteria kept popping out. She was a governor—that's good. The shorter the Washington résumé the better. A female is better still. And then there was her story." He admitted, "There was concern that she was a novice." In addition to Schmidt and Davis, Charles R. Black, Jr., the lobbyist and political operative who is McCain's chief campaign adviser, reportedly favored Palin. Keene said, "I'm told that Charlie Black told McCain, 'If you pick anyone else, you're going to lose. But if you pick Palin you *may* win.' " (Black did not return calls for comment.) Meanwhile, McCain's longtime friend said, "Kristol was out there shaking the pom-poms."

McCain had met Palin once, but their conversation—at a reception during a meeting of the National Governors Association, six months earlier—had lasted only fifteen minutes. "It wasn't a real conversation," said the longtime friend, who called the choice of Palin "the fucking most ridiculous thing I've ever heard." Aides arranged a phone call between McCain and Palin, and scrutinized her answers to some seventy items on a questionnaire that she had filled out. But McCain didn't talk with Palin in person again until the morning of Thursday, August 28th. Palin was flown down to his retreat in Sedona, Arizona, and they spoke for an hour or two. By the time he announced her as his choice, the next day, he had spent less than three hours in her company.

"It certainly was a risk—a risk a lot of people wouldn't take," Dan Coats, a former Indiana senator and now a volunteer with the McCain campaign, said. "But that's what I like about John. There's a boldness there."

The thoroughness of the campaign's vetting process, overseen by the Washington lawyer and former White House counsel Arthur B. Culvahouse, Jr., remains in dispute. The campaign insists that Palin's record and personal history were carefully examined. (Culvahouse declined to comment for this story.) The Los Angeles *Times*, however, reported that the campaign never contacted several obvious sources of information on Palin, including Lyda Green—a Republican state senator in Alaska, and a former ally turned opponent. Also in dispute is whether Palin disclosed to the campaign, as she and officials have said, that her unwed teen-age daughter was pregnant. "I am a hundred per cent sure they didn't know," McCain's longtime friend said. Another campaign source, however, insisted that McCain's team knew about the pregnancy.

The selection of Palin thrilled the Republican base, and the pundits who met with her in Juneau have remained unflagging in their support. But a surprising number of conservative thinkers have declared her unfit for the Vice-Presidency. Peggy Noonan, the *Wall Street Journal* columnist, recently wrote, "The Palin candidacy is a symptom and expression of a new vulgarization in American politics. It's no good, not for conservatism and not for the country. And yes, it is a mark against John McCain." David Brooks, the *Times* columnist, has called Palin "a fatal cancer to the Republican Party." Christopher Buckley, the son of *National Review's* late founder, defected to the Obama camp two weeks ago, in part because of his dismay over Palin. Matthew Dowd, the former Bush campaign strategist turned critic of the President, said recently that McCain "knows in his gut" that Palin isn't qualified for the job, "and when this race is over, that is something he will have to live with. . . . He put the country at risk."

Palin initially provided the McCain campaign with a boost, but polls now suggest that she has become a liability. A top Republican close to the campaign said that McCain's aides have largely kept faith with Palin. They have been impressed by her work ethic, and by what a quick study she is. According to the Republican close to the campaign, she has sometimes discomfited advisers by travelling with a big family entourage. "It kind of changes the dynamic of a meeting to have them all in the room," he told me. John McCain's comfort level with Palin is harder to gauge. In the view of the longtime McCain friend, "John's personal comfort level is low with everyone right now. He's angry. But it was his choice." ♦

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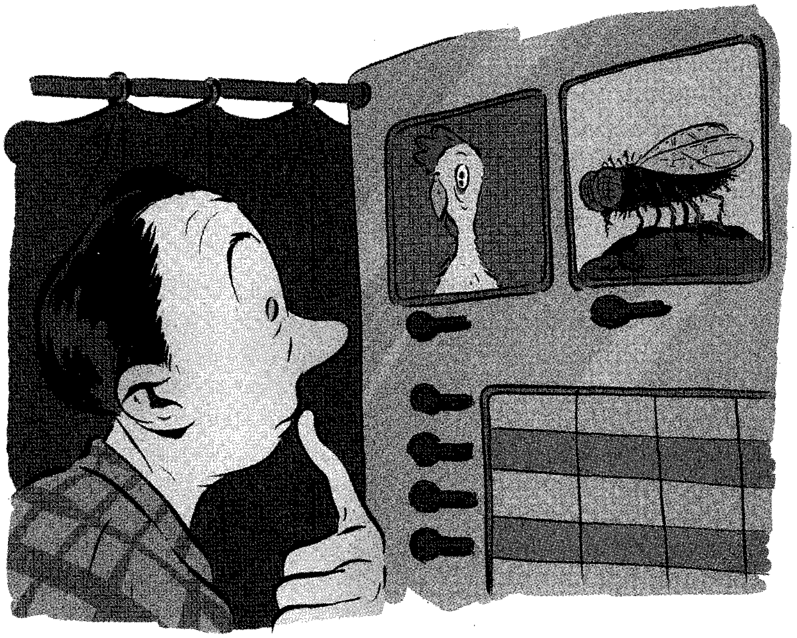
## SHOUTS & MURMURS

# UNDECIDED

### BY DAVID SEDARIS

I don't know that it was always this way, but, for as long as I can remember, just as we move into the final weeks of the Presidential campaign the focus shifts to the undecided voters. "Who are they?" the news anchors ask. "And how might they determine the outcome of this election?"

Then you'll see this man or woman—someone, I always think, who looks *very happy* to be on TV. "Well, Charlie," they say, "I've gone back and forth on the issues and whatnot, but I just can't seem to make up my mind!" Some insist that there's very little difference between candidate A and candidate B. Others claim that they're with A on defense and health care but are leaning toward B when it comes to the economy.



ZOHAR LAZAR

I look at these people and can't quite believe that they exist. Are they professional actors? I wonder. Or are they simply laymen who want a lot of attention?

To put them in perspective, I think of being on an airplane. The flight attendant comes down the aisle with her food cart and, eventually, parks it beside my seat. "Can I interest you in the chicken?" she asks. "Or would you prefer the platter of shit with bits of broken glass in it?"

To be undecided in this election is to pause for a moment and then ask how the chicken is cooked.

I mean, really, what's to be confused about?

When doubting that anyone could not know whom they're voting for, I inevitably think back to November, 1968. Hubert Humphrey was running against Richard Nixon, and when my mother couldn't choose between them she had me do it for her. It was crazy. One minute I was eating potato chips in front of the TV, and the next I was at the fire station, waiting with people whose kids I went to school with. When it was our turn, we were led by a woman wearing a sash to one of a half-dozen booths, the curtain of which closed after we entered.

"Go ahead," my mother said. "Flick a switch, any switch."

I looked at the panel in front of me.

"Start on the judges or whatever and we'll be here all day, so just pick a President and make it fast. We've wasted enough time already."

"Which one do you think is best?" I asked.

"I don't have an opinion," she told

me. "That's why I'm letting you do it. Come on, now, vote."

I put my finger on Hubert Humphrey and then on Richard Nixon, neither of whom meant anything to me. What I most liked about democracy, at least so far, was the booth—its quiet civility, its atmosphere of importance. "Hmm," I said, wondering how long we could stay before someone came and kicked us out.

Ideally, my mother would have waited outside, but, as she said, there was no way an unescorted eleven-year-old would be allowed to vote, or even hang out, seeing as the lines were long and the polls were open for only one day. "Will you please hurry it up?" she hissed.

"Wouldn't it be nice to have something like this in our living room?" I asked. "Maybe we could use the same curtains we have on the windows."

"All right, that's it." My mother reached for Humphrey but I beat her to it, and cast our vote for Richard Nixon, who had the same last name as a man at our church. I assumed that the two were related, and only discovered afterward that I was wrong. Richard Nixon had always been Nixon, while the man at my church had shortened his name from something funnier but considerably less poster-friendly—Nickapopapopolis, maybe.

"Oh, well," I said.

We drove back home, and when asked by my father whom she had voted for, my mother said that it was none of his business.

"What do you mean, 'none of my business'?" he said. "I told you to vote Republican."

"Well, maybe I did and maybe I didn't."

"You're not telling me you voted for *Humphrey*." He said this as if she had marched through the streets with a pan on her head.

"No," she said. "I'm not telling you that. I'm not telling you anything. It's private—all right? My political opinions are none of your concern."

"What political opinions?" he said. "I'm the one who took you down to register. You didn't even know there was an election until I told you."

"Well, thanks for telling me."

She turned to open a can of mushroom soup. This would be poured over pork chops and noodles and served as our dinner, casserole style. Once we'd taken our seats at the table, my parents would stop fighting directly, and continue their argument through my sisters and me. Lisa might tell a story about her day at school and, if my father said it was interesting, my mother would laugh.

"What's so funny?" he'd say.

"Nothing. It's just that, well, I suppose everyone has a different standard. That's all."

When told by my father that I was holding my fork wrong, my mother would say that I was holding it right, or right in "certain circles."

"We don't know how people eat the world over," she'd say, not to him but to the buffet or the picture window, as if the statement had nothing to do with any of us.

I wasn't looking forward to that kind of evening, and so I told my father that I had voted. "She let me," I said. "And I picked Nixon."

"Well, at least someone in the family has some brains." He patted me on the shoulder and as my mother turned away I understood that I had chosen the wrong person.

I didn't vote again until 1976, when I was nineteen and legally registered. Because I was at college out of state, I sent my ballot through the mail. The choice that year was between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford. Most of my friends were going for Carter, but, as an art major, I identified myself as a maverick. "That means an original," I told my roommate. "Someone who lets the chips fall where they may." Because I made my own rules and didn't give a damn what anyone else thought of them, I decided to write in the name of Jerry Brown, who, it was rumored, liked to smoke pot. This was an issue very close to my heart—too close, obviously, as it amounted to a complete waste. Still, though, it taught me a valuable lesson: calling yourself a maverick is a sure sign that you're not one.

I wonder if, in the end, the undecideds aren't the biggest pessimists of all. Here they could order the airline chicken, but, then again, hmm. "Isn't that adding an extra step?" they ask themselves. "If it's all going to be chewed up and swallowed, why not cut to the chase, and go with the platter of shit?"

Ah, though, that's where the broken glass comes in. ♦

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## THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

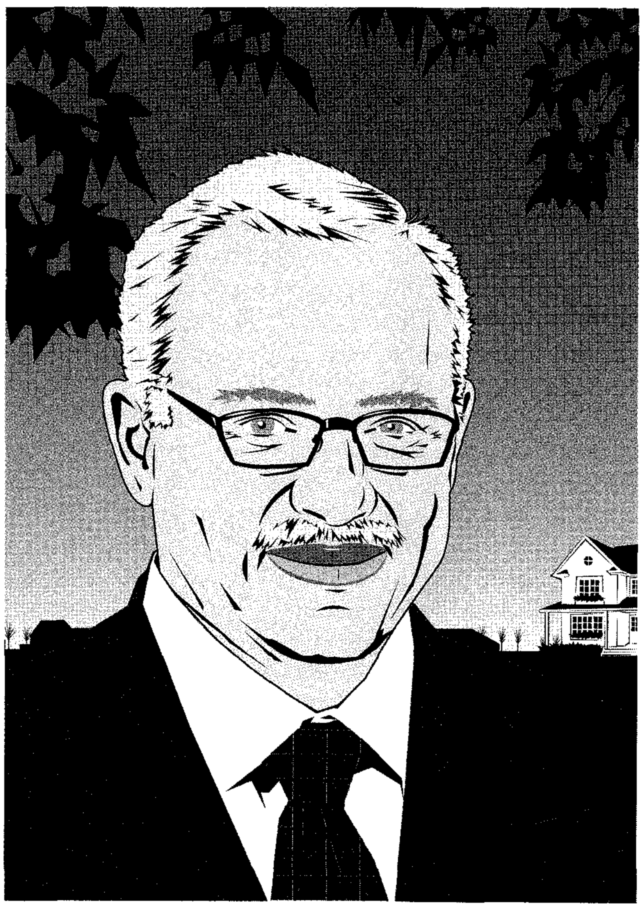
# THE THIRD MAN

*Bob Barr's Libertarian run for the White House.*

### BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

One afternoon in late August, Bob Barr, the Libertarian Party's candidate for President, stood in a greenroom at Stephen Colbert's television studio staring at a closed-circuit monitor. Barr, who was about to appear on "The Colbert Report," was wearing a dark Brooks Brothers suit and an orange tie. As he watched, the monitor displayed Colbert's opening segment—a routine involving footage from Burning Man, the annual culture festival in the Nevada desert known for copious amounts of body paint and psychedelic drugs. Colbert pretended that the footage was from the Democratic National Convention. Speaking over shots of a mud-drenched orgy, he claimed to see "Howard Dean stroking the buttocks of Nancy Pelosi"; a bearded naked man was "Wolf Blitzer out of 'The Situation Room' and out of his situation clothing." In the broadcast version of the segment the relevant body parts were blacked out, but on the closed-circuit monitor the images were uncensored. Barr smiled; when the naked man appeared, his eyes widened and he mumbled, "Did he really show *it*?"

In the nineteen-nineties, Barr, then a Republican congressman from Georgia, led the charge to impeach President Bill Clinton and argued on the House floor that "the flames of hedonism, the flames of narcissism, the flames of self-centered morality are licking at the very foundation of our society." The Christian Coalition gave his voting record a perfect rating, and he became so well known for his dour, ultra-conservative image that he told the voters in his district, "You don't send me to Washington to smile." But in the past few years, Barr says, he has profoundly changed. He now devotes himself to the advance of personal liberty and no longer cares to play the role of law-and-order conservative and culture warrior. After all, America is a free country, or at least this is why Barr says he is running for President: to abolish as many laws as society can bear to lose, to cut away the sinews of federal power, to "get the government out of it."



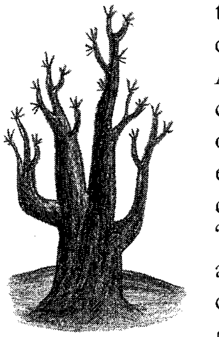
*Barr no longer cares to play the conservative culture warrior.*

QUICKHONEY

To be a third-party nominee for the Presidency, one must achieve a state of mind that in some respects resembles that of the holy fools of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Such candidates are destined to wander the land with little money, yearning for attention and respect while suffering ire and mockery and bad hotels. They persist—whether through force of ego or some inner reservoir of will, or a little madness—though their mission is doomed. "It's like climbing a cliff with a slippery rope," Ralph Nader, who is making his fourth run for President, told me. Even Ross Perot, the Texas billionaire who won twenty million votes in 1992, failed to create a viable party.

For the most part, Barr seems to find the dim limelight of the political fringe uplifting. He is fifty-nine but has the stamina of a college freshman—he consumes up to fifteen shots of espresso a day, typically in five-shot installments. He has a graying mustache, and his hair, which was curly when he had more of it, is white and combed flat across his head. He is trim and compact, but can be expansive in his movements. While making an argument, he often furrows his brow, puts one hand in his pocket, and thrusts the other above his shoulder, in the manner of a prosecutor driving home a point. Throughout his career, aides have struggled to soften his image, urging him to get new glasses—his preferred frames are rectangular and black—or swap his jacket and tie for a sweater. For a political advertisement, a media strategist once had Barr filmed surrounded by bubbles. "There is this sweet little shimmer to the picture, and I think it subtly makes you go, 'Awww,'" the strategist told me. "You have to go to troubles like that with Bob."

Booking a politician on a comedy show is another way to soften his image. Barr was hoping that his appearance on "The Colbert Report" would allow him to air his views at length; his staff had debated the merits of flying him to New York for the taping, or to Denver, where they thought he could attract press attention on the sidelines of the Democratic Convention. Because Barr did not have money for ads—his campaign has raised only a million dollars—he was trying to get as much "earned media" as he could. But the interview with Colbert lasted only three minutes. Between jokes, Colbert asked Barr how he was doing. "Campaign's going good," Barr said. "We're in double digits in a number of states, about six per cent across the country." (He often cites these numbers, from online Zogby polls taken during the summer. They suggested that he had far more public support than any Libertarian Presidential candidate since the Party was founded, in 1971; a double-digit vote for Barr in some states could affect the electoral balance between Barack Obama and John McCain.) Colbert asked him whether he hoped to win over Hillary Clinton supporters.



"I don't think the disgruntled Hillary supporters will be big on Bob Barr," he said, but Colbert was already setting up his next line: "You misunderestimate your mustache, sir."

Back in the greenroom, Barr told one of Colbert's producers, "He loves the mustache. Somebody suggested at the start of this campaign that I shave it off, but people wouldn't recognize me."

Barr lost his House seat in 2002, after serving four terms, and he began to ease himself out of the Republican Party, much like a man removing his tie at the end of a night of overindulgence: first he loosened the knot, then he undid it, and finally the thing came off completely. He held a chair at the American Conservative Union Foundation, but also worked as a consultant for the A.C.L.U. He opened doors in Washington for Libertarian operatives, and in 2006 he joined the Libertarian Party. His departure from the G.O.P. was notable because Barr didn't just work in Congress; he often lived there, sleeping on his office couch. And when the Republican leaders wanted to be sure the far-right wing would support a measure they frequently went to him first. Barr didn't just advocate Second Amendment rights; he held a seat on the board of the National Rifle Association. Although he voted in favor of some civil-liberties and small-government measures, he was also an ardent supporter of the war on drugs. He repeatedly sponsored legislation to undermine ballot initiatives legalizing medical marijuana—"bogus witchcraft," he called it—in Washington, D.C. Barr vehemently opposed abortion, and once argued that even if his wife were raped he would do what he could to prevent her from having one. He wrote the Defense of Marriage Act, voted for a constitutional amendment outlawing flag desecration, and even tried to legislate against Wiccan soldiers who wanted to practice their faith while in the service. A churchgoing Methodist, Barr rarely invoked religion when discussing policy with his aides, but he told constituents that "God's hand" was guiding his votes. In 1998, he traversed the country, trying to persuade people that President Clinton was leading America into amorality. "You can lie, cheat, steal, shoot someone," Barr said in Iowa, at an event attended by Republican Presidential hopefuls. "You can do whatever you want and it doesn't matter—it's a cartoon world." In 1999, *Congressional Quarterly* labelled Barr a "Conservative True Believer."

For many people, including skeptical libertarians, Barr still has the reputation of a partisan, but his self-imposed exile from the Republican Party is representative of a broader disaffection among conservatives who did not immediately rally behind McCain. Republicans in the mold of Barry Goldwater, who believe in small government, minimal constraints on the free market, and expansive civil liberties, have become profoundly uneasy about the direction of the country under President Bush, who has presided over the largest increase in federal spending since the Great Society, raised the national debt to more than ten trillion dollars, suspended habeas corpus for enemy combatants, and recently proposed the seven-hundred-billion-dollar bailout of Wall Street. David Boaz, the executive vice-president of the Cato Institute, and David Kirby, the executive director of America's Future Foundation, have argued that, because of such policies, the libertarian vote, which for decades has been solidly Republican, "may be the next great swing vote." According to surveys, as much as a fifth of American voters hold libertarian values, and in recent years more than seventy per cent of them have voted as Republicans. But Boaz and Kirby noticed that in the 2004 Presidential election only fifty-nine per cent of them voted for Bush, and between the midterm elections of 2002 and 2006 three million of them drifted away from the Republican Party—a shift that Boaz and Kirby argue "may well have cost Republicans control of Congress." In this year's Republican primaries, Ron Paul, the congressman from Texas and a longtime libertarian, earned more than twenty per cent of the vote in Idaho, Washington, Montana, and North Dakota. "His supporters are the equivalent of crabgrass," Frank Luntz, a Republican strategist, told *Time*. "It's not the grass you want, and it spreads faster than the real stuff." In August, Newt Gingrich warned that if McCain chose as his running mate Senator Joe Lieberman, of Connecticut, Barr would win fifteen per cent of the vote.

For Barr, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent expansion of executive power under President Bush, were a political turning point. "I went through Reagan National after 9/11, and saw guardsmen with automatic weapons," he told me. "It dawned on me that we've entered a whole new world. It may have made other passengers feel more secure, but it made me feel dramatically less free. Freedom is a lot more important than security. You can never buy freedom through security." Barr reluctantly voted for the Patriot Act; he says it's among his greatest regrets, and privacy issues are central to his campaign. "When the government can invade the information in your bank account, when the government can listen in to your telephone and e-mail conversations, simply because they think it is necessary to protect us from terrorists, or whoever, they are undercutting the very basis of our free civilization," he says.

Barr does not like to think of his campaign as an insurgent operation. He isn't accessible to reporters in a Straight Talk Express kind of way; he prefers formal interviews. His posters suggest that his is a household name, stating simply "Barr '08." He likes to say that he is competing against "the two other major parties," and his short-term goal has been to reach fifteen per cent in national polls—the price of admission set by Republicans and Democrats to join them in a Presidential debate. "Then we get a level playing field," he says. "Then we can win."

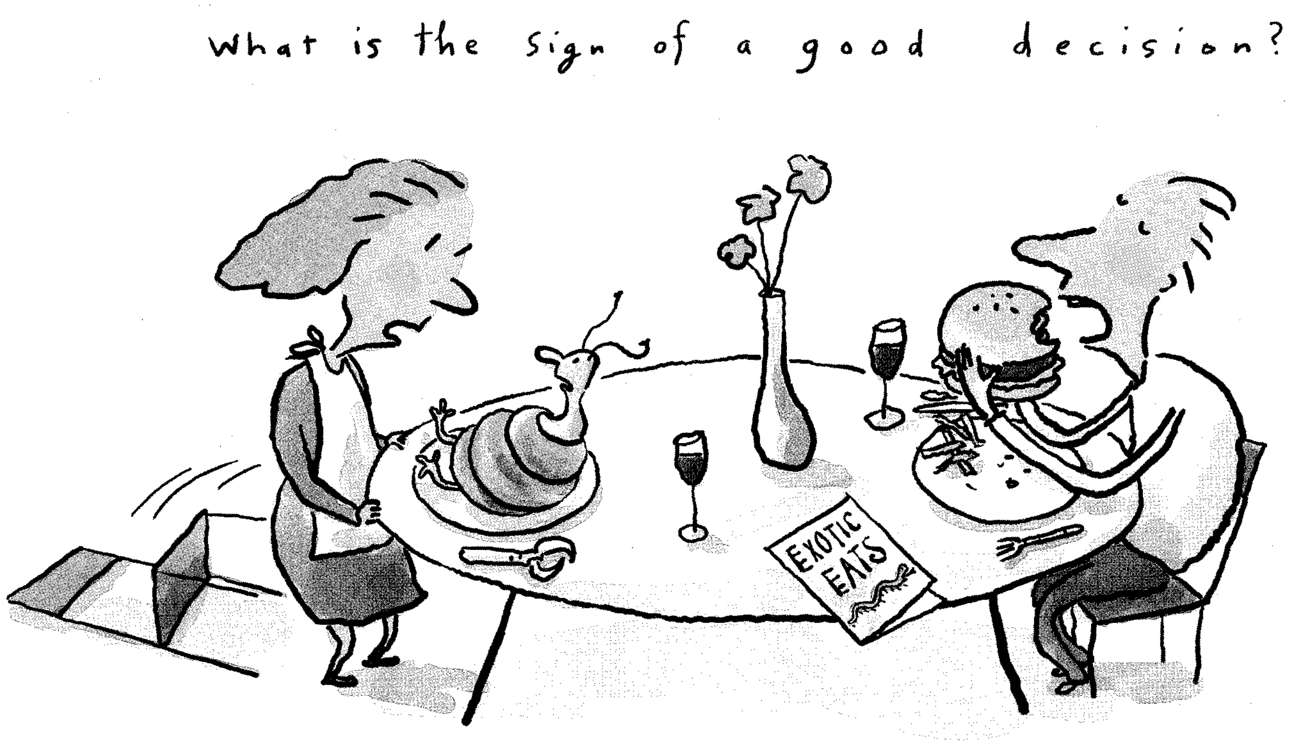
The notion of winning a Presidential election is somewhat novel for the Libertarian Party, which for decades ran candidates for high office mainly as a way to propagate ideals. As David Nolan, one of the Party's founders, wrote in 1971, "This very mania for 'winning now' is one of the factors that makes both of our present major political parties unlikely vehicles for libertarianism." He argued that "a third party, in contrast, can take a long-range approach—running candidates with no intention of immediate victory." The Libertarian Party was for many years controlled by radicals who wanted to drastically reduce the scope of government and expand liberties in a way that would seem reckless to many mainstream voters—by legalizing prostitution, for instance. The Libertarian slogan is "Party of Principle," and its founders believed that principles were more valuable than votes.

In the past decade, libertarians outside the Republican Party have tried a number of ways to overcome their marginality. In 1997, a Libertarian writer named L. Neil Smith encouraged Libertarians to run as spoilers against Republicans who had won elections by five-per-cent margins. Invoking a line from the science-fiction novel "Dune"—"The people who can destroy a thing, they control it"—he hoped to force the Republican Party to adopt libertarian-oriented positions. (In at least five recent Senate races, the Libertarian vote was larger than the Democrats' margin of victory.) In 2001, activists formed the Free State Project, a planned migration of twenty thousand libertarians to New Hampshire—one of the most libertarian states—to concentrate their influence. Nearly nine thousand people signed up; so far, though, only a few hundred have moved.

Barr has been pursuing a different course. "What I have been trying to do in recent years is to get the Libertarian Party to think of itself as a political party that operates in the real world," he told me. "If you present to the American people a program that says, 'Elect us and we will radically change everything you know about the political system as soon as we get into office,' then people aren't going to vote for you." In 2006, Nolan told me, the Party had a "civil war" over its platform, most of which was subsequently dropped. The following year, the Party's dues-paying membership grew by twenty-eight per cent.

Building on this momentum hasn't been easy for Barr, who sometimes demonstrates discomfort with orthodox libertarian positions, including those on abortion and on the legalization of drugs. He often deflects questions on these issues by saying, "It's a mistake to say libertarians believe this, libertarians believe that," or by arguing that the federal government should not have a say in such things. Barr has reversed his position on medical marijuana, but earlier this year when Sean Hannity, of Fox News, asked him, "So if a state wants to legalize heroin and crack, you're O.K. with that?" Barr attempted to dodge the question. Finally, he admitted, "I would not vote to legalize heroin or crack."

In August, I visited Barr at his home in Marietta, a conservative suburb of Atlanta, where he lives with his third wife, Jeri, who runs a nonprofit organization affiliated with the United Way. Storm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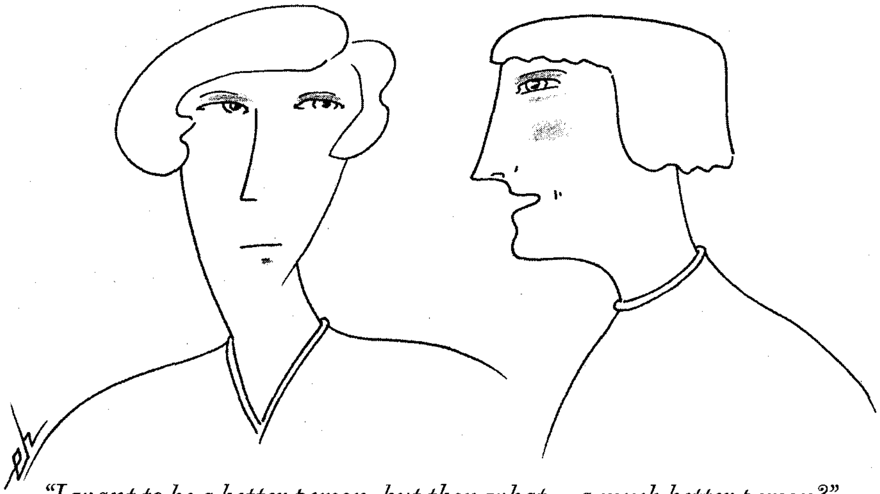


*"I want to be a better person, but then what—a much better person?"*

clouds on the perimeter of Hurricane Fay were gathering overhead. When Barr opened the door, he had a Starbucks cup in his hand and seemed relaxed. His home is meticulously well kept and contains a startling number of elephant objets d'art: lamps, bathroom tiles, coffee-table legs, mirror frames, figurines lined up in rows on a shelf. "Left over from my Republican days," Barr said, and shrugged. "Elephants still make nice knickknacks." The telephone numbers for his home, office, and cell phone all end in 1776.

In his living room, Barr directed me toward a bookcase holding several Presidential biographies and a cuneiform tablet. The tablet was a relic that he and his family had discovered in a pile of ruins in Iraq. "We found it in Babylon," he said. "I suspect the statute of limitations has run out on it." Barr's father, a graduate of West Point, was an engineer who specialized in foreign civil-infrastructure projects, and Barr—who was born in Iowa City, and has five brothers and sisters—spent most of his childhood overseas. He was entering the third grade when his family moved to Baghdad and rented a house near the Tigris. Barr often played along the river, until a brigadier general named Abdul Karim Qasim seized power, in 1958, throwing the country into turmoil. "There was a twenty-four-hour curfew," Barr told me. "You could not leave the house. The only communication we had was among friends and colleagues, and short-wave radio. It was a fairly bloody revolution. I didn't see it, but I certainly knew what was going on."

The family's experience in Iraq established a pattern. As an expatriate, Barr enjoyed unusual personal freedom, but often against a backdrop of tyranny or political upheaval. He was detached from American society as well as from the culture around him. In Panama, where his father briefly took a job, the family one night attempted to have dinner in the American-controlled Canal Zone, but were turned away because their car had a Panama license plate. ("Even though we were U.S. citizens, and this was considered U.S. territory, we were second-class citizens," Barr told me.) Before Panama, Barr's family lived in Peru, where, as a teen-ager, he learned Spanish. He went to parties, drank, and smoked. A friend of his recalled, "Really, there were no rules, and we didn't like rules, and the few rules that there were we really didn't follow." On expeditions into the Amazon, Barr fished for piranhas, and hunted alligators at night. "You would take a .22 rifle and creep along the riverbank with a flashlight," he told me. "The light would catch their eyes, and you would see these two glowing points of red, and you would shoot for that." Barr learned to adapt. "You make friends quickly," he told me. "But you don't become too attached, because you know you're not going to be with them for that long." His hobby was astronomy—the single geographic constant in his life at the time was the sky.

In college, at the University of Southern California, Barr joined the Young Democrats, but his parents, who were Republicans, told him that they would pull him out of school if he didn't give up his membership. He switched to the Young Republicans. Mostly he spent time at his fraternity, TKE. He avoided antiwar protests. (Later, on the campaign trail in Georgia, he said, "The peace symbol is very offensive to me.") After graduation, he worked for the C.I.A. as an analyst of Latin-American issues, and then in the Office of Congressional Affairs. Frederick Hitz, who ran the O.C.A. then, told me that Barr "was quite serious and he got a lot of teasing as a consequence." Barr attended Georgetown Law at night and, in 1978, moved to Atlanta to practice criminal law. He was aggressive and took risks. Once, fearing that policemen might harm a client, an accused cop killer, on an airplane, he hired another plane and flew behind them. When the brother-in-law of Baby Doc Duvalier, the Haitian dictator, was apprehended in Puerto Rico on drug-smuggling charges, Barr and his law partner, Ed Marger, flew to Port-au-Prince to help. ("Ed and I were sitting on this couch in this beautiful residence with Baby Doc and his wife, and all of a sudden this big rat runs across the room," he recalled.)

Barr arrived in Georgia at a time when "the only people willing to be identified as Republicans were the folks who couldn't get into the Kiwanis Club," Chuck Clay, a former Republican leader in the state senate, told me. "They were moving into this area, and felt with some justification that they were looked down on as either Yankees or foreigners, or folks that were not welcome." Barr became the G.O.P. chairman of his county, and as more social conservatives migrated to the area he listened carefully to what they were saying. Marger told me, "He absorbed the right-wing ideas of his constituency"—for instance, hardening his position against abortion. One of his former consultants told me, "Bob is a politician, and that means you do what is necessary to get elected. He was from a conservative district northwest of Atlanta, and he needed to cultivate that conservatism."

When Barr ran for Congress in 1994, Pat Buchanan hailed him as a symbol of "the core of the Republican Party," and he entered the House as a member of Gingrich's Republican Revolution. But he did not befriend many fellow-legislators. In his 2004 book, "The Meaning of Is," he complained about his party's leadership, especially with respect to Clinton's impeachment, and wrote about periods of "intense loneliness." In 1999, Larry Flynt paid Barr's second ex-wife, Gail, to sign an affidavit stating that Barr drove her to a clinic for an abortion and paid for the procedure. (Barr has said, "I have never suggested, urged, forced, or encouraged anyone to have an abortion.") The story, along with his lack of diplomacy during the impeachment process—he insisted on calling senators "jurors," and accused witnesses of not belonging to "the real America"—alienated him from his peers, and Representative Henry Hyde, who managed the impeachment, forced Barr to give up some of his responsibilities.

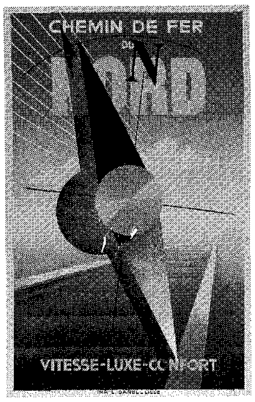
Barr claims that he lost his congressional seat in 2002 largely because of redistricting, but his campaign also suffered from missteps. A few weeks before the election, he was at a fund-raiser in a supporter's home and someone handed him an antique .38-calibre pistol, which went off in his hands. No one was injured, but afterward Barr was ridiculed. His opponent called him a "loose cannon" and promised to "wear a bulletproof vest" at their next joint appearance. At a campaign event, one of Barr's two sons attacked a man who had come dressed as Yosemite Sam, claiming to be "Bob Barr's Official Gun Safety Trainer." The scuffle was filmed by a news crew. "Everybody was trying to say, 'Oh, no, we don't know who did that,' and then we look at the footage and it is Bob's own son," one of Barr's former advisers told me. "Lots of mistakes happened in that campaign. Bob never blamed anybody. I mean, he was the one who shot the dang bullet. We were a point or two ahead, and we were moving in the right direction, but that was by far the last straw."

In the spring, while Barr was toying with the idea of running as a Libertarian, his biggest practical consideration was, What would Ron Paul do? Paul attracted much more grassroots support during the Republican primaries than anyone expected. "At the beginning of the campaign, we concentrated on four states, and it didn't work," Paul told me. But in the primary debates he defined himself as a politician willing to speak his mind. He argued that the September 11th attacks were a reaction to American foreign policy, advocated the elimination of the I.R.S., and invoked the importance of hewing to the Constitution's "original intent" (at one point prompting MSNBC's Chris Matthews, a moderator, to mutter, "Oh, God"). People who had not heard of Paul began sending money to his campaign. Last year, on Guy Fawkes Day, thirty-six thousand Paulites, as they came to be known, raised four million dollars on the Internet—one of the biggest-grossing single-day fund-raising events in electoral history. (All told, Paul raised thirty-five million dollars.) Paul's book, "The Revolution: A Manifesto," is a best-seller. When he withdrew from the race, in June, many supporters encouraged him to run as a third-party candidate. He had run as a Libertarian in 1988, winning just over four hundred thousand votes, and this year he was poised to do much better.

Barr called an old friend, Fred Davis, the Republican media strategist (a McCain supporter, who produced the "Celebrity" ad comparing Obama to Paris Hilton). Barr wondered whether the Libertarian Party was "desperate for someone to just fill the shoes of Ron Paul," Davis told me. Barr thought that Paul might return to the Libertarian Party and run at the top of its ticket, but Paul eventually said that he had no interest in doing so and encouraged Barr to run. In May, two weeks before the Libertarian Party Convention, in Denver, Barr announced his candidacy. He won the nomination only after forming a backroom alliance with an opponent, but in a speech he adopted a reassuring tone, saying, "I may not have committed as early as y'all, but don't cast me aside because I'm a latecomer."

Barr began to court Paulites, telling them that the Texas Republican was "a very good friend of mine." However, it soon became obvious that an imbalance of power separated the two politicians. Paul's supporters could not vote for him in the Presidential election, but they were committed to him nonetheless; Barr was the only libertarian on the ballot, but he lacked a wide base of support. There was also a difference in style. Paul can assert a policy of radical change, but his Texas lilt makes it sound innocuous, and he often yokes disparate issues—the war in Iraq, the behavior of the Federal Reserve, the right to bear arms—into a single failing, the erosion of a great "moral imperative": individual liberty. Barr shares most of Paul's political beliefs but not his record, and he talks in PowerPoint.

To Barr's frustration, Paul's encour-



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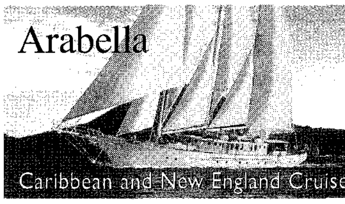

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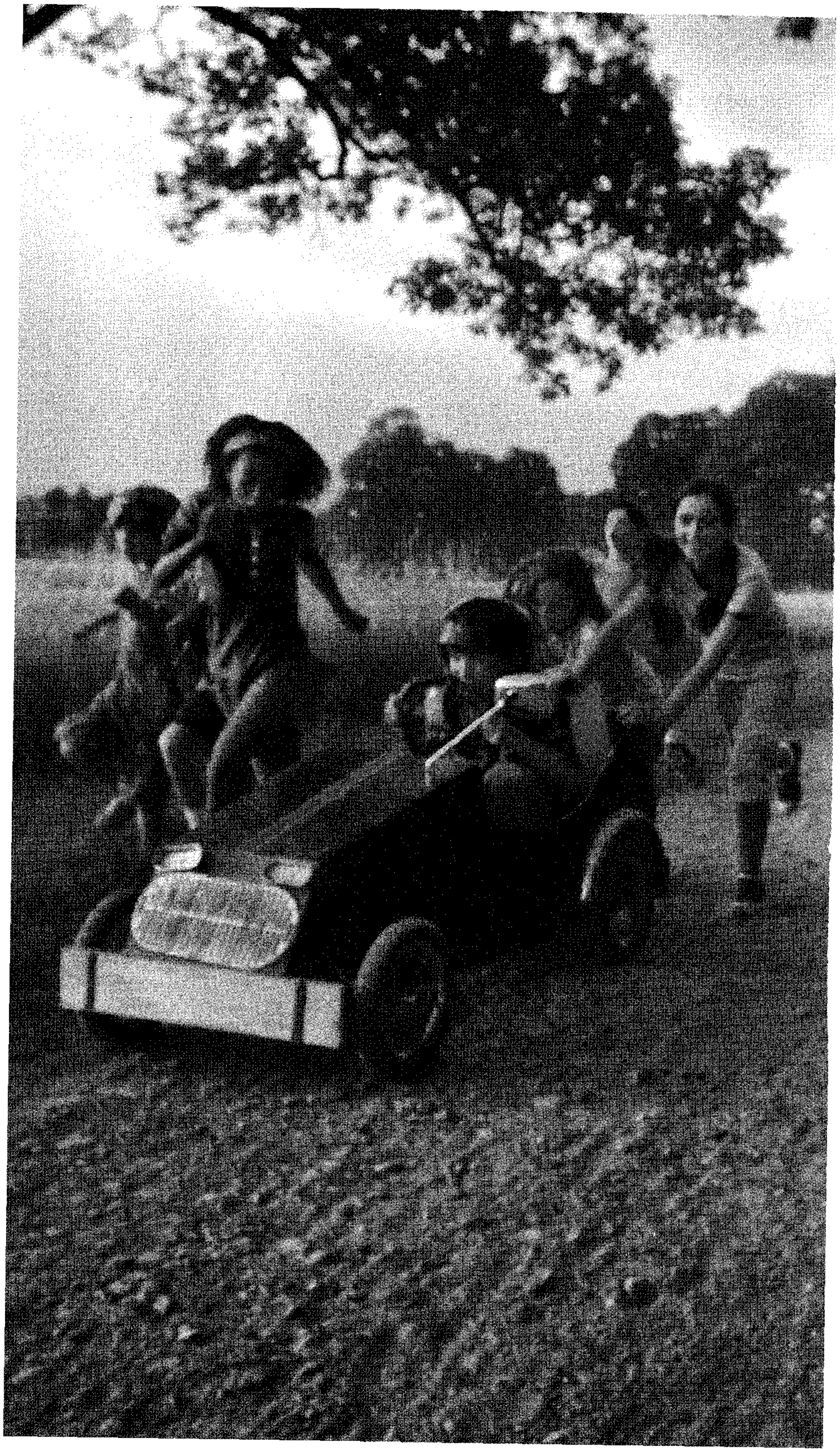

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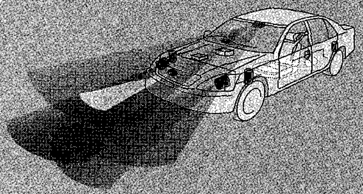

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## THE CROSSING

Not to forget that we had wooden guns once
just as the Germans did when they invaded
the Ruhr in 1936 and likewise
we abandoned wallpaper for paint
and there was an army of 500,000 monkeys
who carried wooden rifles over their heads
when they crossed the Delaware and how
the Hessians applauded and how George Washington
ordered grog for everyone there and since it
was a Christian holiday they built
the largest fire in New Jersey history
and even burned their beautiful boat whose curves
anticipated the helical waves and whose bottom
unfolded, as it were, or shot through water
something like a bottle or just skimmed
the surface like a stone and everyone sitting
stood up, not only Washington, and shouted
just above Trenton almost the shortest night
of the year and we spoke Deutsche and everyone hugged
the person to his right although the left was
not out of the question and we said, "Peace," we
always say it, the way they said it on the Rhine,
the way they said it on the Danube, and now the
Ohio, and now the Mississippi, the Batsto,
the Allegheny, hug your monkey, kiss
the nearest Romanian, kiss the nearest Greek.

—*Gerald Stern*

agement did not evolve into an endorsement. After withdrawing from the race, Paul decided to maintain a "neutral stance" toward the November election. He invested his money and energy in Campaign for Liberty, an organization he created to promote his philosophy, and he urged supporters to run for low-level office. "I don't have a rule that I say, 'Hey, look, now everybody is going to infiltrate the Republican Party and take it over,'" he told me. "A lot of them want to do it. And we may have a bunch of state representatives and others who will be winning seats this year, and so that has a lot more momentum in that area than I ever dreamed. Young people are always attracted to principles, because they see through the hypocrisy of an older generation, and I think that is what has energized so many of them."

As the Republican National Convention was taking place in St. Paul, Ron Paul hosted an event in Minneapolis that he called Rally for the Republic. It was held in the Target Center, an arena not far from where McCain was planning to accept the nomination. Ten thousand supporters showed up, as did a dozen speakers, including Tucker Carlson, the political commentator, and Grover Norquist, of Americans for Tax Reform. Barr was not asked to speak, but his staff bought tickets, and he decided to campaign on the rally's margins. I got there early, and as people waited to enter I met two Paulites from Georgia: David Williams, a musician and former Republican, who had long hair and was wearing a Statue of Liberty T-shirt, and his friend Sean Mangieri, a real-estate agent, whose T-shirt identified him as a member of the "Revolutionary War Veterans Association."

Williams said that he became interested in Paul last year, when he "just heard his name on the Internet, and found that he was the real thing. I wasn't really looking, just heard discussions in chat rooms and from other news." He was uncertain about Barr. "I'm not sure I totally trust his character yet," he said. "Much of his voting record is non-libertarian—"

He was cut short by a commotion nearby. A bald man with a mustache and a goatee had begun shouting excitedly, "I'm in a state of bliss being among so many freedom-loving people!"

"It's about human rights," Mangieri said, picking up where Williams had left off. "I'm a Republican. I actually pay dues, but I've felt disaffected with the Party since high school. Ron Paul's message—you can say it is about small government, or about tax reform, or any of those things, but it is fundamentally a human-rights issue. Our Constitution is the only document that protects human rights, and those fundamentals are the things that we want to get back to." Mangieri said that he might support Barr, but he wasn't sure, either.

When Barr's entourage arrived, there were a few hundred people on the sidewalk, and it was drizzling. A couple asked him to sign their lucky two-dollar bills. A Libertarian, unbidden by the campaign, followed Barr around holding a "Barr '08" poster above the candidate's head. ("I've got the fun task of being a sign holder," the man said.) "We've got Fox News," Steve Sinton, Barr's communications director, said. Barr's staff ushered him toward a camera and made sure that a few supporters were standing nearby.

Sinton was hoping to cause a disturbance that would attract reporters—a strategy he calls "causing a riot, getting used, and killing electrons." The previous day, a group called Minnesotans for Limited Government had invited Paul and Barr to speak at a small picnic in Langford Park, and Barr did so, but then refused to leave when he was asked. When an organizer said that Paul would not appear unless Barr left, Sinton told the man, "The Congressman just got up and talked about liberties, one of which is freedom of speech."

"Yeah, right, that's fine, and this is our picnic," the organizer said. Security guards began to close in.

At the Target Center, Paul's security team was less vigilant, and Barr set out to win over skeptical Paulites. A man who shook his hand said, "I'm debating about writing in Ron Paul or voting for you. I don't know if it would matter." Someone asked whether the C.I.A. should be abolished. "No," Barr said. "We need a strong foreign-intelligence capability. The key is to make sure that it doesn't become too powerful." Barr walked over to a woman who was in a wheelchair; they spoke quietly, and then he moved away. Moments later, the woman's husband, a thin man with a beard, became agitated. He started yelling, "Get out of here, Bob!" and "No to Barr!" I asked them what had happened. They were libertarians, they said, but their daughter had severe epilepsy, and Barr had told them that he did not support the Americans with Disabilities Act.

By early autumn, Barr's campaign had drifted even farther toward the political margins. McCain had announced Sarah Palin as his running mate, a choice that helped restore some conservative support to his campaign. John Zogby told me that the six-per-cent national figure that he had recorded for Barr this summer was inflated—his most recent polls put Barr at one per cent.

In mid-September, Ron Paul decided to hold a press conference at the National Press Club, in Washington, to encourage his supporters to vote for a third party, and he invited the Green, Libertarian, and Constitution candidates to participate. All of them attended except Barr, whose campaign advisers decided that he shouldn't be "reduced to their level." Ralph Nader, who is running as an independent, told me, "He got Ron Paul so angry. I was right in the greenroom"—at the National Press Club—"and Ron Paul was pacing, and it was ten-oh-two, ten-oh-three, and then he heard that Bob Barr was not going to show up, and he went furious. He said, 'I can't believe he let me down like this. I was about to say a good word for him.'" Two hours later, Barr arrived at the National Press Club and invited Ron Paul to be his running mate; the theatrical gesture only further angered Paul's supporters, and some libertarians circulated a petition demanding that Barr withdraw his candidacy. (Two weeks later, Paul endorsed the Constitution Party candidate, Chuck Baldwin.)

That evening, Barr was scheduled to attend a benefit called the Funniest Celebrity in Washington Contest, held at the D.C. Improv, a comedy club. He had asked Steve Young, a political humorist who sometimes uses the name Dr. Failure, to help him write material for a standup routine. When I arrived, Young was scribbling one-liners on cue cards as he waited for Barr. "That tightness," Young said, holding his chest, referring to Barr. "I wonder where that comes from." He had wanted Barr to deliver his lines in the deadpan style of Steven Wright, but Barr was unfamiliar with Wright's comedy. In any case, once Barr arrived, it was clear that he was not in the mood for jokes. He had barely rehearsed, and he had toned down Young's humor—he refused to ask the audience to imagine how Libertarians would "screw up Washington." Instead, he said onstage, "Now, Libertarians have never been in charge of anything, you know. In 2008, I say, Vote Libertarian. It's high time that we get our chance. It can't get any worse." Then he concluded, "My name is Bob Barr, and I did approve this standup routine." ♦

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### LETTER FROM ZIMBABWE

# THE DESTROYER

*A founding father lays waste to his country.*

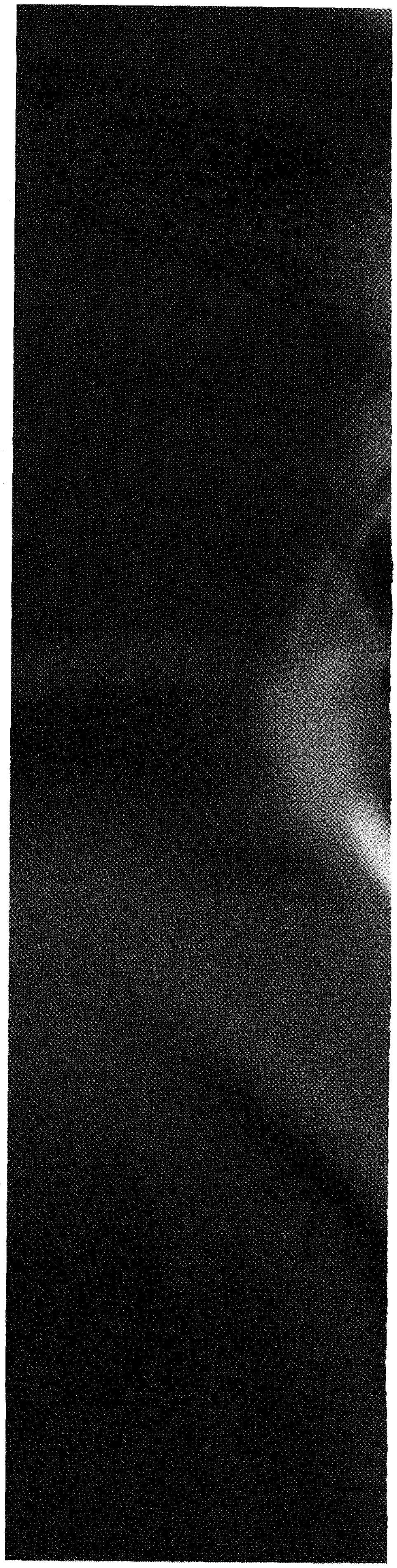
### BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Nine hundred years ago, at a site on a high plateau north of the Limpopo River called Great Zimbabwe, Shona kings built stone palaces where they lived in splendid isolation from their subjects, with absolute authority over their means to sustain life—cattle herds, land, and the gold that came out of the earth. In the nineteen-sixties, members of a liberation movement in what was then Southern Rhodesia, among them Robert Mugabe, adopted Great Zimbabwe's name to refer to the notional state they were fighting for. Today, Mugabe can be said to be the owner of the riches that remain in the nation of Zimbabwe. After twenty-eight years, he remains in power—Zimbabwe's only President since the end of white-minority rule, in 1980. His nephew Leo, therefore, leads a cushioned life. He is an entrepreneur and has stakes in several companies, among them a mobile-phone network. He is a director of Zimbabwe Defense Industries, which purchases the weaponry for his uncle's Army—most of it, these days, from China. He also controls at least one large farm that had been seized from its white owners. In the nineties, Leo earned notoriety for his alleged role in securing kickbacks, on behalf of his uncle and other officials, in the construction of Harare International Airport. In 2005, he was arrested for the contraband export and sale of government-owned food, but the charges were withdrawn for lack of evidence. (Leo said the allegations in both cases were unfounded.) That year, he was a candidate for Parliament for the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, known as ZANU-P.F., the ruling party. He won in a landslide.

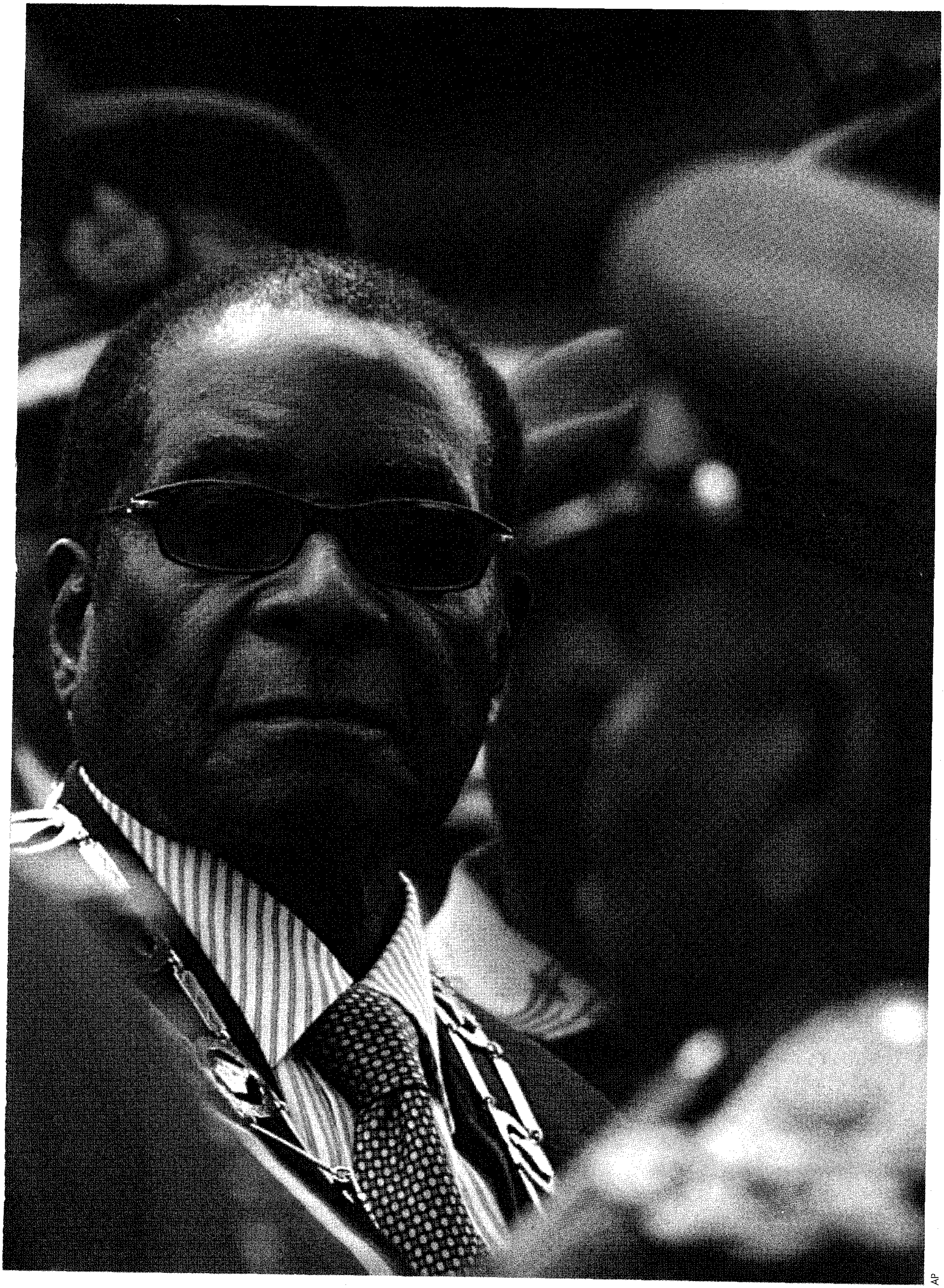
Earlier this year, Leo was added to a sanctions list first imposed by the United States in 2003 against Robert Mugabe and members of his government. The sanctions included a travel ban and the freezing of foreign assets, and also prohibit Americans from doing business with those on the list. Leo was also named on a sanctions list maintained by the European Union, for his arms-dealing activities. The new sanctions came in response to a wave of terror that Robert Mugabe had unleashed in the country's Presidential campaign. More than a hundred and fifty opposition supporters were murdered, many were raped, and thousands of people were beaten or tortured, often after being herded into so-called reëducation camps. Because of the violence, Mugabe's rival, Morgan Tsvangirai, whose Movement for Democratic Change, or M.D.C., had won in the country's first round of voting in March, dropped out of the race and went into hiding. In the runoff vote on June 27th, Mugabe was unopposed and was quickly declared the winner.

Leo Mugabe works from an office building he owns in Harare, where I met him this summer. His brand-new silver Toyota Land Cruiser Amazon was parked outside. He is a slim, goateed man of fifty-one, and was dressed in a dark tailored suit. On the wall behind his desk hung a map of Zimbabwe made out of a patchwork of animal skins. His secretary, a young woman wearing a tight skirt and jacket, very high heels, and a great deal of jewelry, sat down with us. Her hair was arranged in red-dyed cornrows, and as Leo spoke she scribbled everything down on a notepad, expressing approval whenever he made a point, like a personal cheerleader. He was in a good mood, emanating confidence and optimism over Zimbabwe's future.

"Have you seen anyone beaten up since you've been here?" he asked. "There was less violence here than in Nigeria! And we all know why Zimbabwe's violence is being exaggerated—it's about the fortune in the land. We have certain re-



*Robert Mugabe at the Armed Forces Day celebrations in Harare, in August.*



AP

*"Maybe something a bit more commander-in-chief?"*

• •

sources here, such as nickel, gold, and platinum. I think Zimbabweans now understand that they are suffering because of sanctions by the United States, Great Britain, and the Europeans." Otherwise, Zimbabwe's prospects were excellent—his uncle had been distributing computers to rural schools, for example. "In a few years, rural Zimbabwe will be computer-literate. We are a nation which is moving, and these children will understand what empowerment really means."

That week, however, the inflation rate in Zimbabwe had officially reached eleven million per cent, the highest in the world; analysts later reckoned it to have been two hundred and thirty million per cent. Eighty per cent of Zimbabweans were out of work. Chronic malnutrition was prevalent, and starvation was spreading in the countryside. Close to two million Zimbabweans depended for survival on food handouts from international aid agencies. Twenty per cent of the population was infected with H.I.V./AIDS. Zimbabwe's life expectancy is forty-four years for men, forty-three for women. But Leo Mugabe scoffed at the idea that the situation was dire. "People are going about their business," he said. "No one is starving—they are driving nice cars! As a Christian, though, I think it is a challenge by God, and the attention being drawn to Zimbabwe is maybe to highlight that we are the new people of Israel, and that we have our own Moses." I understood "Moses" to be his uncle. His secretary greeted the analogy with an exclamation of delight.

Under Robert Mugabe's leadership, in 2000 his most militant supporters—many of them veterans of the seventies civil war—began forcibly occupying the country's white-owned commercial farms, with the help of armed gangs and, frequently, ZANU-P.F. officials. By almost all accounts, these actions precipitated the country's economic decline. Leo disagreed. "We have no regrets—he has none, and I have none," he said.

"We have taken the land," Leo went on. "So what is the next move? The next move is the mines, the minerals. We know we are very rich—without the British or the Americans. Yes, they invested, but if we have to we will go and take over the mines, too." Zimbabwe has the world's second-largest platinum reserves and is relatively rich in other minerals. The country's mining industry accounts for some forty per cent of its export income. In 2006, Robert Mugabe threatened to nationalize the mines by assigning Zimbabwe a controlling fifty-one-per-cent stake in them. Negotiations with the mine owners, which include South Africa's Implats and Anglo Platinum, and the United Kingdom's Rio Tinto, have dragged on ever since. "Rio Tinto can stay there in London, but their mines and their equipment will stay here. Is that what they want? Because that's where they are headed," Leo said. "We can give the mines to the black Zimbabweans, the people who work them now," he added. "We are not going to go back on the land issue, and the wealth that lies underneath the land will remain ours, too."

Leo wasn't bothered by the possibility that seizing the mines might leave Zimbabwe even more isolated. "We have also invited other rich and powerful countries to come, and we know what they are interested in—the Russians and the Chinese and the Indians, too," he said. "The Americans and the Brits are not coming to the table, but *these* guys are willing to deal with us. And they are already here." He added, "It's happening this year. By 2010, we will be flying!"

As I took my leave, Leo Mugabe informed me that diamonds had recently been discovered in eastern Zimbabwe. The find had convinced him, he said, that there was "something unique about this time, in this country."

Robert Mugabe's regime is hostile to Western reporters, and most of the journalists who visited Zimbabwe this summer were disguised as tourists, avoiding official contacts and possible arrest. (The *Times* correspondent Barry Bearak was detained for four days.) When I entered Zimbabwe, therefore, I proceeded with some caution. I stayed not in a hotel but in a family's home, and I drove around Harare in a used Nissan pickup truck, dressed in an Adidas tracksuit I had bought in Johannesburg, passing for a white Zimbabwean.

There were a few ZANU-P.F. officials whom I could interview, however. More than anything else, I wanted to understand what kind of logic had led Robert Mugabe to destroy his country, and his own reputation. "He was the liberation hero of an era—a poster child for African liberation. Bob Marley played at his inauguration in 1980," Peter Bouckaert, the emergencies director for Human Rights Watch, told me. "That's the tragedy of what's happened there." Although few African leaders dared to speak out publicly against him, Mugabe, who is eighty-four, had become an object of international derision and contempt. In June, he was stripped of the honorary knighthood that Queen Elizabeth II had bestowed on him in 1994; that same day, Nelson Mandela, at his ninetieth birthday party, lamented "the tragic failure of leadership in our neighboring Zimbabwe."

Even Morgan Tsvangirai, who has paid a hard price for his opposition to Mugabe—surviving three assassination attempts, trial for treason, and, last year, a severe beating by the police that left him with serious head injuries—told me that Mugabe inspired "divided emotions." "He is, on one hand, the man who liberated our country from the white colonialists, and he is also this man who has murdered and repressed in a dictatorial manner," Tsvangirai told me. "I say: he is the founding father of Zimbabwe, and the problem we have is to save the positive side of his contribution to this country, and to let history judge his negative contributions." He added, "For me, I find it quite profound that he is quite an old man who has mismanaged his own succession."

During my visit, I drove through farmlands that were unkempt and fallow and largely depopulated. Much of the land had been scorched by fires. Here and there, bluish tendrils of smoke curled upward from the burning bush. I passed one former white-owned commercial farm after another, their owners gone, their croplands ravaged. There were roofless barns and greenhouses, collapsed boundary fencing, and what had been plowed land dotted with squatters' thatch-roofed huts. Groups of destitute-looking men and boys stood at the roadside selling whatever they could—onions, oranges, wooden carvings of animals—or waiting hours for the chance of a ride. There were very few cars on the roads. At checkpoints on the outskirts of Harare, policemen waved down vehicles to inspect them for illegal quantities of "mealie-meal"—ground maize, the Zimbabwean national staple. Along with the severe food shortages, there was a thriving black market, and the Mugabe government had imposed strict price controls on essential foodstuffs. Individuals caught carrying more than the legal amount of food often had to pay bribes to the police, or face confiscation of their goods.

In the weeks after the election, as the political stalemate persisted, the value of Zimbabwe's currency plummeted. Before crossing the border from South Africa, I had exchanged a hundred American dollars for three trillion five hundred billion Zimbabwean—thirty-five billion to a dollar. Most of the cash was newly minted five-, twenty-five-, and fifty-billion-dollar notes, with pictures of giraffes and grain silos. A few days later, the going rate was a hundred billion to one. Food prices tripled overnight, and many salaries were made virtually worthless. Cash was becoming nearly impossible to obtain; banks were allowing customers to withdraw the equivalent of only one U.S. dollar per day. The effect was a state of existential madness. Prices bordered on the fantastic, and ordinary people had to grapple with calculations in the trillions for the most prosaic transactions. One day, I wandered into a supermarket to buy some water. The price for a half-litre bottle was $1,900,000,000,000 Zimbabwean, or nineteen U.S. dollars. On a nearby shelf, I found a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black for $83,000,000,000,000.

It wasn't only Zimbabwe's economy that had a looking-glass quality. In the capital, there was a semblance of outward calm—people went to work, African women walked by with loads on their heads, and pairs of white women went jogging through neighborhoods with names like Trelawney, Avondale, and Belgravia—but the tortured bodies of missing M.D.C. members were still turning up, and Tsvangirai and many of his fellow party members were living in semi-hiding. The city was plastered with campaign posters of Mugabe in a defiant pose, one fist raised, bearing the slogan "The Final Battle for Total Control." Notwithstanding the terror tactics that had for years been used to intimidate Zimbabwe's media, opposition newspapers continued to be published, with front-page photographs showing victims of official violence. These were sold at Harare's traffic lights, alongside pro-government newspapers, which reported from a parallel reality in which Comrade Mugabe was the much beloved leader of all Zimbabweans, the country's election violence had been caused by the M.D.C., and the true reason for Zimbabwe's economic suffering was the "illegal sanctions" imposed by the West.

The *Sunday Mail* of July 13-19th ran a front-page article headlined "FIRST LADY DISTRIBUTES TRACTORS." There was a photograph of Grace Mugabe, the President's second wife. (They were married in a lavish ceremony in 1996, after his first wife died of a kidney ailment; Mugabe was seventy-two and Grace, who had been his secretary, was thirty-one. At the time of the wedding, they already had two children; they have since had a third.) She was seated behind the wheel of a tractor, wreathed in jewelry and wearing a campaign shirt emblazoned with her husband's portrait. "President Mugabe has taken it upon himself to make sure the nation is fully empowered to utilize the land," the First Lady told the paper. "Nowhere in the world has a government distributed farm equipment to its citizens. He is doing this be-

*"Polly want half of everything you own."*

cause he has the people at heart." In an allusion to the war veterans, she added, "Those who died during the war did not die in vain. They died so that we can have 100 percent total empowerment."

"Empowerment" has been one of the rhetorical pillars of Mugabe's government, but many of the schemes to benefit black "indigenous Zimbabweans" have been used by those in positions of authority or influence to enrich themselves. For all the talk of redistribution, Mugabe and his circle have not so much broken with the past as assumed for themselves an updated version of the country-club life style once enjoyed exclusively by the nation's whites. There are many newly built luxury villas in Harare, and a sizable number of Mercedes-Benzes and Volvos, the vehicles of choice among Zimbabwe's black nomenklatura. (Affluent whites seem to prefer S.U.V.s.) In 2005, Mugabe and his wife moved into a new twenty-five-bedroom mansion in Borrowdale Brooke, a Harare suburb, which cost a reported ten million U.S. dollars to build. Nobody knows exactly how he paid for it, but in Harare it is received wisdom that the mansion was financed by the Chinese, to whom the President had granted lucrative mining and trade concessions. Mugabe said openly that he had the help of "foreign governments." (He added that Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, a personal friend, had donated tropical timber for the roof; China was reported to have supplied the shiny blue roof tiles.) Grace Mugabe has become infamous for her shopping expeditions abroad and, like Imelda Marcos, her expensive taste in shoes; she has been quoted as saying that because of her narrow feet she can "only wear Ferragamo." Shortly after her marriage to Mugabe, Grace oversaw the construction of another mansion, called Graceland, which was allegedly built with public funds. She later sold Graceland to the Libyan government.

Another legacy of the colonial era is the cross-hatching of interests between the government and the private sector. A mining-company official I met with, a white man and a prominent figure in Zimbabwe, spoke of fending off direct requests for bribes from a senior cabinet minister, whom he described as "especially rapacious." He confided that the executives of several mining companies had, under pressure, given large sums of money to government officials that were used to help fund the ZANU-P.F. election campaign. He added that Mugabe and his cronies would probably continue to use the threat of expropriation of the mines as a "political bludgeon" to extract bribes from mining companies. Meanwhile, he expected to see "more Chinese take over more dubious concessions."

This kleptocratic style of government has had a trickle-down effect: corruption and graft are depressingly unremarkable in Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Transparency International places the nation near the bottom of its global index on corruption for 2008, at No. 166 out of a hundred and eighty countries surveyed. Corruption is the key to the regime's survival, and the economic instrument that sustains it.

The First Lady's tractor-giving munificence was also a form of patronage. The beneficiary was Zvimba, a rural district just northwest of Harare, where, on February 21, 1924, her husband, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, was born, in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia. Mugabe was the third of four sons of a Shona couple. When he was ten, his two older brothers died, and Mugabe's father, a carpenter, abandoned the family. His mother was left to look after him, his younger brother, and his two sisters. (One of them, Sabina, Leo's mother, was the M.P. for Zvimba, and was involved in orchestrating a number of violent land seizures.) She managed to have Robert educated at a Jesuit mission school, where he was given a scholarship by the Irish headmasters. He went on to attend a South African university, Fort Hare, where, in 1951, he obtained a B.A. in history and English literature. He spent several years teaching, and earned two more degrees, in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), and newly independent Ghana, where the charismatic Marxist leader Kwame Nkrumah was providing inspiration and tutelage to a generation of black nationalists.

Mugabe was radicalized during his time in Ghana; he also met Sally Hayfron, his first wife. In 1960, they returned to Southern Rhodesia, and Mugabe, who had developed into a skilled orator, soon emerged as the secretary-general of ZANU, one of the country's two main black nationalist parties. The other was the Zimbabwe African People's Union, or ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo. ZANU's constituency was principally the Shona people, Zimbabwe's dominant ethnic group; ZAPU's support came mostly from the Ndebele, the Zulu-related tribe that inhabits southwestern Zimbabwe. And ZANU, Mugabe's party, was nominally Maoist, receiving Chinese assistance, including training by Chinese military instructors, while ZAPU adhered to Soviet policy and enjoyed Russian backing. (Key members of the ruling élite, particularly in the military, have personal ties to China that go back to those days.)

In 1964, Mugabe, who had been arrested a number of times, was charged with encouraging subversion and spent the next eleven years in prison. In 1965, as other colonies were gaining independence under black African leaders, Southern Rhodesia's colonial Prime Minister, Ian Smith, unilaterally declared independence from Britain, on behalf of the white minority (eventually proclaiming the land the republic of Rhodesia). The following year, Mugabe's only child with Sally, Nhamodzenyika, a boy of three, died of encephalitis. During his time in prison, Mugabe obtained four more degrees, including one in law, after passing correspondence courses from British and South African universities.

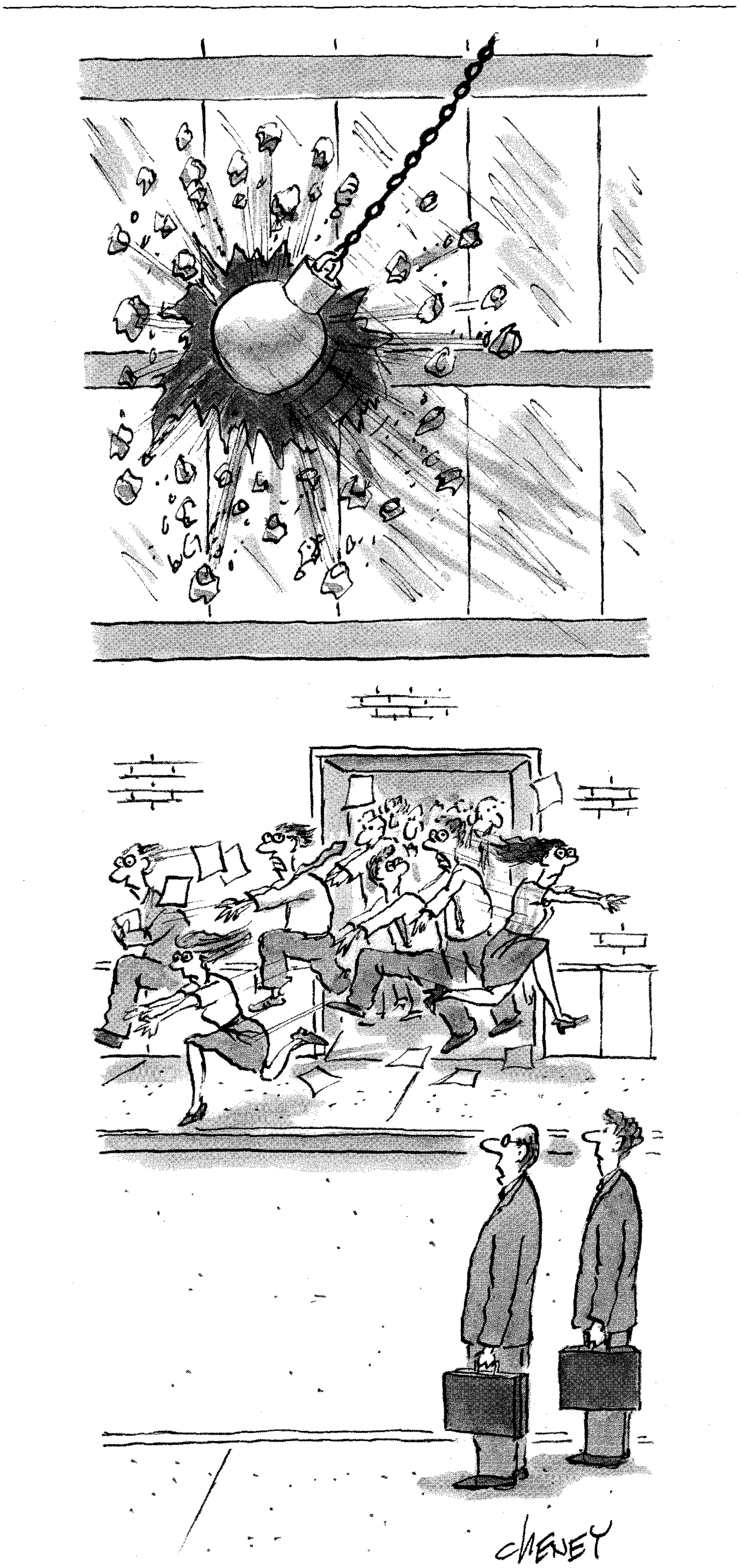
After his release, in December of 1974, Mugabe fled to Mozambique, to join his exiled ZANU comrades, who by then had a guerrilla force engaged in a full-scale fight against the Rhodesian Army. Some thirty thousand people are believed to have died in Rhodesia's civil war, which black Zimbabweans refer to as the Liberation War, and which whites call the Bush War. The fighting continued until 1979, when the British brokered ceasefire talks at Lancaster House, in London. Mugabe was one of the signatories to the resulting agreement, and, in February, 1980, he and his party won Zimbabwe's first general election.

Mugabe had agreed to an "independence constitution" that could not be altered for ten years: whites, who made up five per cent of the population, were granted twenty seats out of a hundred in Parliament, and, in return for a British commitment of financial assistance for a "willing seller, willing buyer" scheme to help settle landless blacks, Mugabe agreed not to touch the country's white-owned farmlands.

The land issue did not go away, however. It dated to the eighteen-nineties, when great swaths of land were granted to white settlers, while Africans were forcibly confined to designated "communal lands"; a century later, most blacks were still landless. In its first decade, Mugabe's government purchased some six and a half million acres, about a third of the white-owned land, and settled some fifty thousand families on it. But there was little follow-through, and most of the black farmers did not thrive. In 1990, Mugabe secured a constitutional amendment that allowed his government to requisition land at will, and to set the purchase price. Wrangling between the government and the white farmers ensued, with no resolution, even as expropriations proceeded in a haphazard and arbitrary fashion. The process was accompanied by corruption: Mugabe's political opponents lost farms while his allies and relatives were allocated land.

The gathering contradictions of those years laid the groundwork for a new political opposition, led by Morgan Tsvangirai. In contrast to Mugabe, who is moody and socially aloof, Tsvangirai is outgoing and warm and, at fifty-six, is a generation younger than Mugabe. His origins are equally humble: he is the son of a bricklayer, the eldest of nine children. Unlike Mugabe, he did not finish high school but went to work in a nickel mine to put his siblings through school. He became a labor organizer, and in 1988 was elected secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Under Tsvangirai, the labor movement became the main vehicle for Zimbabwe's fledgling opposition, gradually taking shape, in 1999, as the M.D.C.

In the late nineties, Tony Blair's Labour government and other Western donors refused to continue subsidizing Zimbabwe's "land reform." In retaliation, Mugabe staged a constitutional referendum, in February of 2000, that would give him wider powers, including the authority to confiscate land without consultation. The M.D.C.—which, in those days, had close ties to Zimbabwe's white farmers—campaigned forcefully against Mugabe's bill, and it was defeated. A few weeks later, groups of machete-wielding so-called "war veterans" simultaneously



*"As usual, the employees are the last to know."*

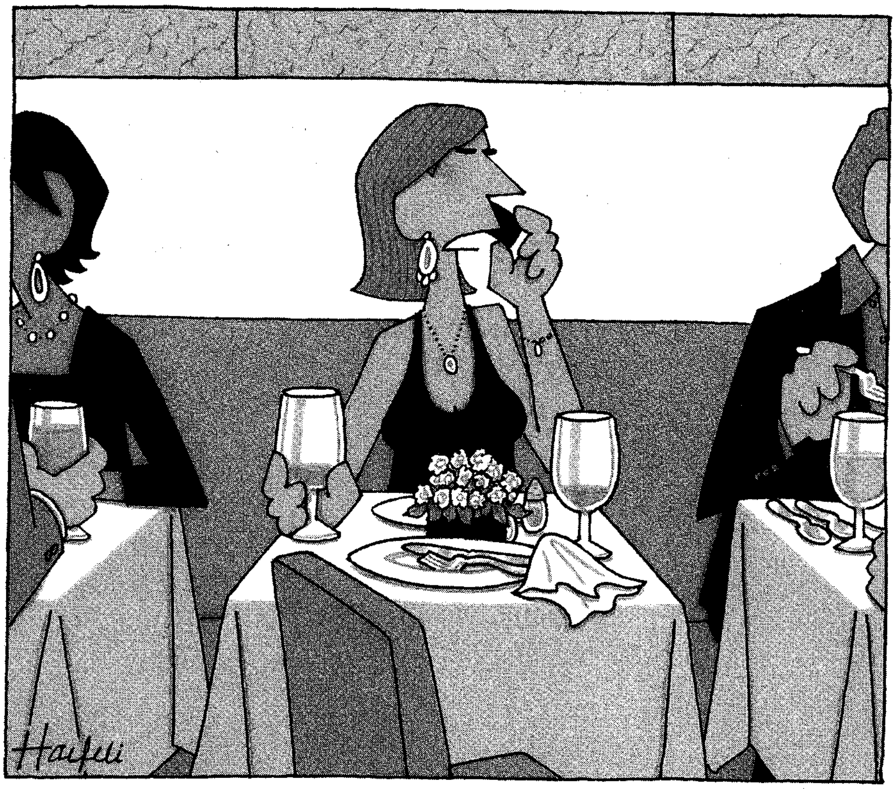
invaded white-owned farms across the country. Mugabe made it plain that the land invasions had his blessing.

In the textbooks used in Zimbabwe's public schools, the issues of land, wealth, and race are pointedly linked. In a chapter titled "Money and Wealth" in the fifth-grade social-studies textbook, there is a section that reads:

> The whites took over the land. They farmed the best parts themselves, and sold their crops for money. The blacks were left with poor land, and not enough of it. They soon began to need money to buy food, because they could no longer grow enough for themselves. They also needed money to pay taxes to the white government.
>
> But the blacks found it hard to earn much money. They had to work for the whites, and they were never paid very much. All the best paid jobs went to the whites. Unlike their ancestors, who often had many possessions, most Zimbabweans were now poor. . . . This has now changed; blacks and whites are working together in Zimbabwe.

But the results of the farm-seizure policy have been disastrous for almost all Zimbabweans. Of the forty-five hundred white-owned commercial farms that existed eight years ago, and which accounted for more than half of Zimbabwe's arable land, all but about four hundred have been taken over; most were looted and destroyed. About a dozen white farmers and many more black farmworkers have been murdered. Half a million black farmworkers have been made destitute, along with their families, having lost their jobs and their homes at the same time. (In 2005, Mugabe ordered the police to bulldoze shantytowns in Harare and other cities, where many of the black farmworkers had ended up, in an operation that he called "Drive Out Rubbish." Seven hundred thousand were left homeless.) Less than a decade ago, Zimbabwe was one of the breadbaskets of Africa, exporting maize and meat to its neighbors; today, there is no commercial agriculture to speak of. As many as three million Zimbabweans have fled to South Africa as migrant workers. (They have not been entirely welcome: last May, in an outbreak of xenophobic violence, many were killed by marauding gangs in townships in Johannesburg and elsewhere.) Life for most Zimbabweans revolves around economic survival.

"Everyone is agreed on the need for land reform; we didn't agree on the methodology," Tsvangirai told me. "The landless are still landless, freebooters are still exploiting, the selection process was wrong, and everything is chaotic." He added, "We can't go back to pre-2000, but the chaos that is taking place now cannot continue."



*"He's not so much a conversationalist as an expounder."*

In an elevated parking garage in downtown Harare, I met with a war veteran whom I'll call Baltazar. He was in his late fifties, dressed in a worn houndstooth jacket. Baltazar was one of ZANU's élite Chinese-trained guerrilla cadres. He had worked directly for Mugabe at the beginning of his Presidency—and had liked him—and then for Zimbabwe's intelligence service under diplomatic cover in China, the United States, and Africa. But he had a large family, and needed money for school fees. He told me that he had been involved in the takeover of a white-owned farm. "I was one of several people working in the President's office who were offered a farm," he said. "We made an arrangement with the owner. He would do the plowing for us with his tractors, and he would give us the seed we needed, and he would keep seventy per cent of the returns." They had been there about a year and a half when, he said, "an official came out with a document saying that the area would be taken over by a big man in the government. We resisted until they called in a police support unit, and we realized it was hopeless and gave up."

Things had not worked out for the "big man," however, and Baltazar and his associates had been told that they might be able to reoccupy the land. So far, they hadn't. "We now realize we would not be able to do anything with the land without resources—we would need equipment, loans, which are not there. And, secretly, it's because we anticipate a radical change in the country and we don't want to be associated with a regime that took over land and then misused it."

Baltazar shot me a look, and said, "The occupation of land was very popular after the liberation, because the whites owned it and they were rich, and so the people, and many war vets, thought that if we took over the farms then we will automatically be well-to-do, like the whites whom we removed. We didn't realize that it took them decades to make those farms productive. Most of us now realize that farming is not a simple process."

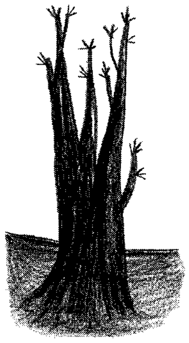
Baltazar was defensive about the war veterans' role in the country's unfolding catastrophe. "My experience is that most are not interested in violence—those involved in violence are either pseudo-vets or opportunists." But, he conceded, "some are, and some are benefitting." One of the things that had led to the push for land, he said, was that veterans with serious injuries had received nothing from a highly publicized war victims' compensation fund, while senior officials had been given large sums for slight or imaginary wounds. Now, things had gone very far, and veterans felt obliged, because of what they had done, to back the regime at all costs: "The regime has instilled fear in the war vets that they will lose their pensions and they might face retribution from whoever might take over."

The elections in March, which Tsvangirai won by almost forty-eight per cent to Mugabe's forty-three (forcing a runoff, since neither candidate achieved an absolute majority), were a shock to Mugabe and his supporters, and led to a rush to attach blame. "ZANU-P.F. began to be too relaxed about things," Ben Moyo, a Mugabe loyalist since the sixties and a former M.P., told me. "They didn't see this party"—the M.D.C.—"as an agent of British colonialism, as a real threat, and so they didn't campaign much. I didn't, either. We thought the people would vote for us, as they always do," Moyo said. "And, meanwhile, the people forgot the vision of the liberation struggle. The people were saying, 'What good is liberation without food?' That's when we had to begin the reëducation process for the 27th of June, to remind them why it was we took up arms to fight."

The "reëducation process," I realized, was Moyo's euphemism for the terror camps into which thousands of people had been herded in the weeks before the June 27th runoff. Most were detained and given political lectures by ZANU-P.F. militants; many were beaten, or worse.

"I was the commander of a base camp," Moyo acknowledged. "We brought youths to the camp. We also used them to control the black market. We feared some prices were being rigged by the opposition. It was also used to punish those people who were misbehaving, from the opposition and also from ZANU, and they'd be beaten up. But each base commander was different. At my camp, we disciplined people from our own party, but never the opposition party. The violence was not as bad as reported. Some disciplining was necessary. But one can't deny there were abuses, especially in rural areas."

Even so, Moyo said, the M.D.C. had grossly exaggerated the violence to make the ruling party look bad. "They are experts in the art of lying," he said. "If a couple has a domestic dispute, the opposition party goes and takes pictures and then says, 'This is ZANU-P.F. violence.' And the foreign media believe it." Moyo paused, and then appealed to me: "Look at Zimbabwe! Go around and look where these things are supposed to be happening every day. The violence here is not as bad as what we have seen in other countries in the continent. Sometimes on the satellite television channels they show images of violence that are supposed to be from here, and we can see they are really television images taken in Kenya, or from Rwanda—not Zimbabwe at all!"



Listening to Moyo's explanations, I recalled an encounter I had had in South Africa the previous week with a twenty-three-year-old Zimbabwean refugee named Michael. He was being interviewed by Paul Verryn, a Methodist bishop who runs an asylum for Zimbabwean political refugees at Johannesburg's Central Methodist Church. It was a filthy and overcrowded building, but it provided a refuge of last resort. On the night that I visited, more than a thousand Zimbabweans were living there; I had to step over their sleeping bodies, packed tight on every surface, including the stairways. Verryn invited me to sit in as he questioned prospective new residents. Michael, a lanky young man, stood out from the others—he appeared troubled and his body was rigid. When he spoke, he looked down, and did not make eye contact with either of us. At Verryn's prompting, he said that he was from the town of Masvingo, and that his parents were elderly and unemployed. The breadwinner of the family had been his elder brother, but he had fled to South Africa. This had left Michael to look after his younger brother and sister by himself. "This was very hard," he said. "I was so under pressure."

Michael still did not look up.

"Go on," Verryn said.

"In order to get work, I was forced to join the Youth"—the youth wing of ZANU-P.F.—"and forced to beat the people, and other things, and I became so desperate." Michael spoke hurriedly. "And I came here to refresh myself." He was trembling. He had run away without telling anyone, and had arrived in Johannesburg four days earlier. Verryn asked him a few more questions, and then told him that he could stay. He called an aide to give Michael an I.D. and some food. Once Michael was gone, Verryn said, "I think that young man may have killed people."

Verryn said that there were many young refugees like Michael, soldiers and youths who had been compelled to do terrible things to other Zimbabweans. As Zimbabwe's political violence worsened, he was seeing much anxiety and "derangement" among the recent arrivals. He speculated about the motivations behind Mugabe's use of political terror. "I don't think Mugabe has 'lost it,'" he said. "I think he knows exactly what he is doing. I think he's politically astute, and he thinks this is the way you run a country. You don't countenance any opposition."

The diamond discovery that Leo Mugabe mentioned had occurred in the hills around the town of Mutare, near the Mozambique border. There were reports that, in rural communities in the vicinity, killing and torture at the hands of ZANU-P.F. militants and war veterans continued apace well after the election. On the town's outskirts, in an abattoir, I met with Pishai Muchauraya, a thirty-two-year-old newly elected M.P. for the M.D.C. "Twenty-one cases of murder, eighteen in the runup and three since," Muchauraya told me. The killers were "ZANU-P.F. and soldiers, sometimes assisted by the police." An additional twenty-five people, he said, had disappeared. They were believed to have been murdered and dumped in a reservoir, a place called Ruti Dam. "It's crocodile-infested," he said.

I asked Muchauraya how he had survived. He grinned, and replied, "Ah, with difficulty." Like all of Zimbabwe's Members of Parliament, he hadn't been able to take his seat, because Parliament had yet to be convened. For the time being, he lived semi-underground, sleeping in other people's homes.

A white woman came in and, at Muchauraya's instructions, began showing me images on a computer screen. A young man's back was covered with what looked like a few dozen large punctures; they had been caused by the drips from burning plastic, Muchauraya said. Another man's buttocks were covered with suppurating wounds. It was a common form of torture in Zimbabwe: people were forced to sit on something hot, like a fire grate, and then beaten badly on their buttocks. This was humiliating as well as painful. Other victims were injured on the soles of their feet, which made it hard for them to walk.

Three local women, the wives of M.D.C. officials, had been gang-raped. In the worst incident, one of the women was raped by eighteen men. "Probably she will contract H.I.V.," Muchauraya said. "Given Zimbabwe's statistics, as many as six of the men who raped her were probably infected." As digital images of torture, abuse, and mutilation flicked by, Muchauraya looked at me and said, "As you can imagine, all of this makes the thought of reconciliation difficult. Of course we want reconciliation, but as a responsible party we cannot ignore these crimes, and the people responsible for them must be held accountable."

In July, South Africa's President, Thabo Mbeki, had come to Harare in a bid to negotiate a settlement. After first refusing to meet with Mugabe, Tsvangirai relented. He and Mugabe had dinner together, and afterward signed a Memorandum of Understanding, committing themselves to further talks. When I asked Muchauraya how he felt about all that, he bristled. "So he had dinner with Mugabe," he said. "It was obligatory. But in our view things are moving in the right way, because, by sitting down with Tsvangirai, Mugabe was also recognizing him, and that has never happened before. We have tamed the bull." Within the M.D.C. there were widespread worries that Tsvangirai might be outmaneuvered, though. (It had happened before. In the mid-eighties, faced with a restive ZAPU, Mugabe created a new Army brigade, sent it to North Korea for training, and then deployed it in a vicious counterinsurgency campaign. After an estimated twenty thousand civilians were killed, Joshua Nkomo agreed to unity talks, which led to his party's absorption into ZANU. He was given the newly created post of executive vice-president, which turned out to be largely ceremonial. When Nkomo died, in 1999, Mugabe declared him a "national hero.")

In September, an agreement appeared to have been reached in which Mugabe would stay on as President while Tsvangirai would become Prime Minister and the M.D.C. would be given about half of all cabinet posts. This would not be the transitional government that the M.D.C. had hoped for, however, but a power-sharing arrangement. The deal looked even more questionable once Mugabe made it clear that he meant to keep all the powerful portfolios, including Defense, Home Affairs, and Justice, leaving the M.D.C. minor ones like Water Management. As of last week, the deal was on the verge of breaking down.

"In an ideal world, in such negotiations, you have an honest partner, not a dishonest one. Mugabe has been dishonest," Tsvangirai told me in a phone interview last week. "Anything can happen if this falls apart—there can be unintended consequences from the people, or from people fed up within certain institutions. This is it. There is nothing else, which is why they cannot fail." Still, he wasn't sure how long his side could continue talking. "People have shown resilience, but now people's confidence is being undermined, as they see that this is a deal with a bad man," Tsvangirai said. "What I am trying to get is a good deal with a bad man."

## LEARNING TO MAKE AN OUD IN NAZARETH

The first day he cut rosewood for the back,
bent sycamore into ribs and made a belly
of mahogany. *Let us go early to the vineyards*
*and see if the vines have budded.*
The sky was blue over the Jezreel Valley
and the gilt dove shone
above the Church of the Annunciation.
The second day, he carved a camel-bone base
for the fingerboard.
*I sat down under his shadow with delight.*

The third day, he made a nut of sandalwood,
and a pick guard of black cherry.
He damascened a rose of horn
with arabesques
as lustrous as under-leaves of olive beside the sea.
*I have found him whom my soul loves.*
He inlaid the sound hole with ivory swans,
each pair a valentine of entangled necks,
and fitted tuning pegs of apricot
to give a good smell when rubbed.

The fourth was a day for cutting
high strings of camel gut. *His left hand*
*shall be under my head.*
For the lower course, he twisted copper strings
pale as tarmac under frost.
*He shall lie all night between my breasts.*
The fifth day he laid down varnish.
*Our couch is green and the beams of our house*
*are cedar and pine.* Behind the neck
he put a sign to keep off the Evil Eye.

Mugabe and his allies have long accused the M.D.C. of being little more than a Trojan horse for Western powers. In September, Mugabe complained to a crowd of his supporters,

*My beloved is a cluster of camphire*
*in the vineyards of En-gedi.*
I watched him whittle an eagle feather, a plectrum
to celebrate the angel of improvisation
who dwells in clefts on the Nazareth ridge
where love waits—and grows, if you give it time.
*Set me as a seal upon your heart.*
On the sixth day the soldiers came
for his genetic code.
We have no record of what happened.

I was queuing at the checkpoint to Galilee.
*I sought him and found him not.*
He'd have been in his open-air workshop—
*I called but he gave me no answer—*
the selfsame spot
where Jesus stood when he came from Capernaum
to teach in synagogue, and townsfolk tried
to throw him from the rocks. *Until the day break*
*and shadows flee away*
*I will get me to the mountain of myrrh.*

The seventh day we set his wounded hands
around the splinters. *Come with me from Lebanon,*
*my spouse, look from the top*
*of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens.*
On the eighth there were no more days.
I took a class in carpentry and put away the bridal rug.
We started over
with a child's oud bought on eBay.
He was a virtuoso of the oud
*and his banner over me was love.*

*—Ruth Padel*

"Putting ZANU-P.F. and the M.D.C. together to work together is like mixing water and fire. It is quite difficult for these parties to be friends—especially if one party is being supported and sponsored by the outside countries that are pushing for a regime-change agenda." Speaking of himself in the third person, Mugabe added, "They want Mugabe to go. But where should he go?"

Mugabe is not entirely wrong about official U.S. and British hostility toward him. On the day that I visited James McGee, the U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe, a satellite television in his office was tuned to CNN, which was broadcasting live images of Radovan Karadzic from The Hague, where he was being arraigned before the International Criminal Tribunal on war-crimes charges. Karadzic had been arrested nine days before, and still wore the bushy white beard that had disguised him for years as a fugitive. With reports circulating that Mugabe and his senior aides had demanded guarantees of immunity from prosecution in their talks with the opposition, the timing seemed apt. I asked McGee whether he thought that seeing Karadzic brought to justice was alarming to Mugabe.

"Yeah," McGee said, smiling. "I happen to know for a fact that this has had Mugabe worried—and, personally, I like that."

Since assuming his post, in late 2007, McGee, a fifty-nine-year-old Vietnam veteran, had shown, for a diplomat, an unusual willingness to confront Mugabe. This has earned him the admiration of Mugabe's critics, and the enmity of the regime. In May, at the height of the political violence, McGee led a convoy of diplomats into a ZANU-P.F. reëducation camp, where, he charged, people were being tortured. This resulted in a standoff with police in which McGee leaped onto the hood of a car and snapped pictures with his cell-phone camera. A few days later, Mugabe threatened to expel him. McGee told me that on a recent trip to Washington he had recommended pressuring Mugabe further by placing the members of ZANU-P.F. on a terror watch list. I asked if that was likely to happen.

"Nope," McGee said, with a shrug, but he added that the United States and the European Union's new, expanded sanctions list—the one with Leo Mugabe's name on it—might do some good. He cited the announcement by Zimbabwe's central-bank governor, that morning, of a new currency that had ten fewer zeros. The "new" banknotes were, in fact, old ones that had been stockpiled. McGee believed that the measure had come about because a German company had halted its shipments of banknote paper after calls for it to be placed on the E.U.'s sanctions list—the country, quite simply, was running out of paper on which to print its money. "They think it'll buy them three months," he said. "I don't think it will give them more than two weeks' breathing space."

McGee viewed the regime's threats to seize the mines with both anger and dismissiveness. "They'll screw it up just like they did the agriculture with the farm invasions, and they'll be left with nothing," he said. "The Russians and the Chinese would take what they wanted and leave again, and it would not affect us at all. They can't touch us. Let them do it. I'd like to see them try."

The problem for McGee is that the U.S. has little direct leverage over Zimbabwe. Since 2005, Mugabe has sought to counter the West's sanctions with a policy called "Look East," and has been sustained, in part, by the trade deals he has struck with China. On July 11th, the members of the U.N. Security Council voted on a U.S.-sponsored draft resolution that called for further sanctions against Zimbabwe; China and Russia vetoed it. For the application of pressure, the U.S. has been forced to defer to Zimbabwe's neighbors in the African Union and the Southern African Development Community, but the talk-softly approach adopted by their appointed "facilitator," Thabo Mbeki, who is seen as partial to Mugabe, has effectively kept Mugabe in power. Mbeki was himself forced out of office in September but continued to act as mediator, with even less authority.

Mugabe is one of the last of Africa's so-called big men, the generation of post-independence nationalist leaders who ruled their nations for decades and, with few exceptions, stifled democratic alternatives. In recent years, that has changed: Kenneth Kaunda stepped down from power in Zambia, as did Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Both settled into roles as their countries' grand old wise men, similar to the one enjoyed by Mandela. Mugabe, however, seems incapable of giving up. Jon Elliott, a former British Foreign Office official who now works with Human Rights Watch, suggested that the West had to take care in facilitating Mugabe's removal without giving him an alibi for clinging to power. "Mugabe is part of the dinosaur generation, as compared with what's happening elsewhere in Africa," he said. "I think Mugabe wants to go, but won't if it's because of international pressure. The economy is in a desperate situation, so he's looking for a deal that will bring in money and investment and buy him a grace period to choose his successor."

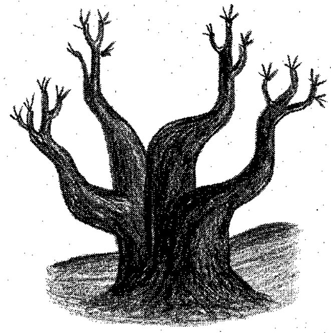
The M.D.C.'s national organizing secretary, Elias Mudzuri, told me, "We are isolated here, fighting for democracy, but we need the West to help us. I am not ashamed to say this. I am not a puppet of the West." When I met Mudzuri, he was wearing a baseball cap that said "National WW II Memorial, Washington, D.C." on it. In 2002, he was elected mayor of Harare, but under government pressure left his job and the country. He took his family to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he earned a master's degree in public administration at Harvard. When he returned for the recent campaign, he said, ZANU-P.F. militants went to his home village and severely beat his eighty-year-old father; several weeks later, the old man was still hospitalized.

"It's the U.S.'s responsibility, because it is democratic, and is the most powerful country in the world," Mudzuri said. "Don't expect Russia and China to do it, because they are not democratic, and, meanwhile, wherever there is a dictatorship, and natural resources, they will loot our countries. That's what they want, and they are busy establishing themselves. Look at Darfur."

He added, "The West is afraid to be accused of being neocolonial, as Mugabe accuses it of being. But this is not what is happening. What is happening is that twelve million people are under siege by a purported liberator." Mudzuri concluded, "Why is it O.K. to help Iraq and fund everything there, but wrong here? To leave Africa to the dictators and the looters doesn't help you. Where is Big Brother? He is not here."

In the nineteen-nineties, Zimbabwe was an emerging destination for tourists, with such attractions as Victoria Falls, but almost no one travels there anymore. Nor do many come to see Great Zimbabwe. The citadel's ruins—the fortified bastion, on a bluff, of the Royal Enclosure, and below it the high-walled kraal and the conical tower of the Great Enclosure, believed to have been used for sacred rites—are the largest man-made stone structures in Africa south of Egypt. Since 1986, Great Zimbabwe has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, but on the day I went the only other visitors were several Arab men wearing tracksuits, and their wives, in head scarves and long dresses. They turned out to be off-duty diplomats from the Libyan Embassy.

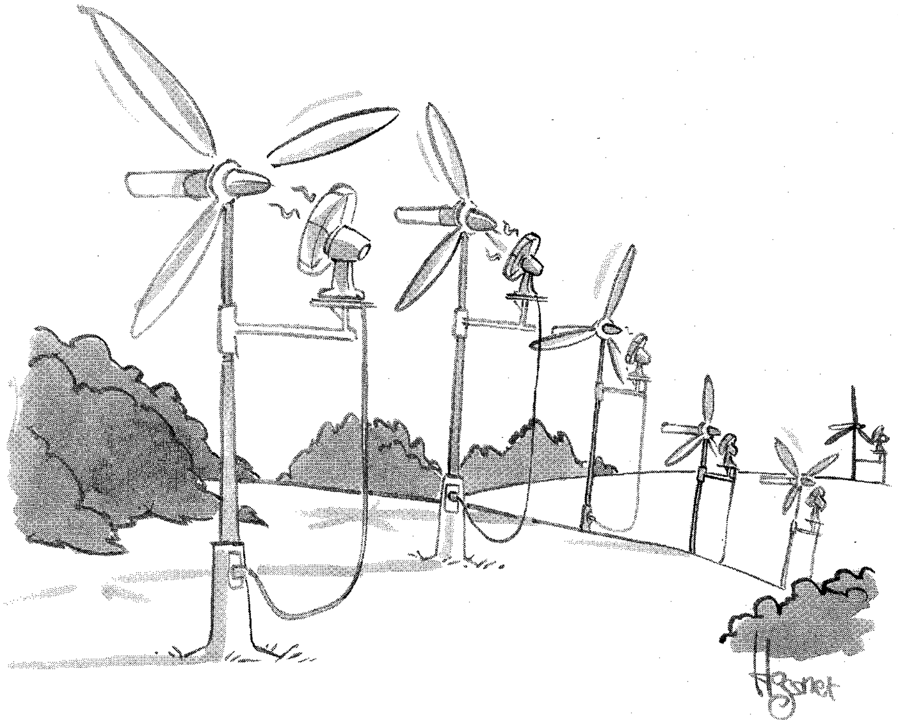
Between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, when the citadel was abandoned for reasons that remain mysterious, Great Zimbabwe was a regional power and an important trading center. Celadon utensils from China, along with glass beads and porcelain from India and Arabia, have been found there. Early Portuguese explorers brought word of its existence to Europe, but their descriptions were cloaked in myth and legend; some believed that the citadel had a connection to the Queen of Sheba, or that perhaps it was the Biblical city of Ophir. In 1889, Cecil Rhodes, the mining tycoon, was granted a royal charter by Queen Victoria to explore and settle all the lands between the Limpopo and the Zambezi Rivers. The first city founded by Rhodes's heavily armed Pioneer Column of gold-hungry settlers was Fort Victoria (now Masvingo), not far from Great Zimbabwe. Rhodes was fascinated by the ruins, and he commissioned several archeological expeditions to explore the site. These archeologists suggested that the ruins, and especially the tall stylized birds, carved from soapstone, that guarded the citadel, were evidence of an advanced white or "Semitic" civilization, possibly Egyptian or Phoenician or even the scions of the "mythical inhabitants of Great Britain." (Such theories persisted well into the sixties, even though they had long been debunked.) By 1902, the year Rhodes died, all but one of Great Zimbabwe's intact soapstone birds had been looted, including one that had been given pride of place in Rhodes's elegant Cape Town home, Groote Schuur.



The soapstone birds, and Great Zimbabwe itself, came to form an indispensable part of the contested historiography of the country. Rhodes and his colonialist successors sought a white presence in the country's distant past to justify their claims to it, while the black-nationalist leaders who emerged in the sixties—men like Robert Mugabe—saw an ancient indigenous civilization as vindication of their own rights. Since 1980, all the known birds, except for Rhodes's, have been returned.

At the doorway to Great Zimbabwe's little museum, the sole attendant, a young woman, was reading a romance novel. She checked my ticket and waved me through. At the back of the dimly lit building, seven of the sphinx-like birds were perched like sentinels on stone plinths. The birds faced a wall hung with faded photographs of Robert Mugabe.

Since assuming power, Mugabe's avowed mission has been to efface Rhodes's legacy. Harare's name was changed from Salisbury, and its main boulevards have been renamed after African liberation heroes—Mandela, Samora Machel, and, of course, Mugabe. But twenty-eight years after a bronze statue of Rhodes was toppled by a mob in Cecil Square—now Africa Unity Square—there is still a Cecil Rhodes Street, and his presence is felt in other ways. "Mugabe has totally absorbed the colonial legacy," Bishop Verryn



told me. "Look at his clothes and the way he speaks, his spending sprees. It's wonderful, it's amazing, given his anti-colonial rhetoric. But his radical discourse—that's what he thinks people want to hear."

Since the end of white rule, the relationship between the races has remained tentative, and unresolved. But one effect of the farm seizures is that Zimbabwe's white population has shrunk, from about two hundred thousand in 1980 to some twenty thousand now. Most of the so-called "Rhodies" emigrated to South Africa and the United Kingdom, but many have also settled in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. In recent years, some of Zimbabwe's dispossessed white farmers have found a welcome for their agricultural skills in such African countries as Nigeria and Zambia. (Whites who, despite everything, have stayed in Zimbabwe refer to themselves, familiarly, as "Zimbos.")

For a few days, I was the guest of a white farming family, among the last remaining in the area, in a rural valley north of Harare. It was at the edge of the Great Dyke, a mineral-rich geological formation that extends for some three hundred miles across Zimbabwe. The family, whom I will call the Edwardses, were tobacco farmers. In the spring, invaders had begun moving onto their land, they said, but had been inexplicably turned back by the commander of the local ZANU-P.F. terror camp, who was also one of the most notorious war veterans in the area. The Edwardses didn't know how long they would be able to stay. Both the husband and the wife were born in Zimbabwe and had spent their entire lives there. They were taking each day as it came. Edwards told me that every morning, at the roll call he conducted for his workers, several war vets showed up. They either approached him directly or sent him written requests for things—usually fuel, or mealie-meal—through his farm manager. He generally gave them what they asked for. He estimated that it was costing him forty to sixty thousand U.S. dollars a year out of the hundred thousand that the farm earned (down from about seven hundred and fifty thousand in good times). "There is really no choice," he said. "It's either give them a version of what they want or face a militant invasion."

One day, we climbed a granite mountain near the Edwards farm to view some prehistoric San, or bushmen, cave paintings, but found them marred by freshly scrawled graffiti. We drove past a local wildlife preserve where, at the start of the year, there had been ten white rhinos. Now there were only four; the others had been attacked with machetes or shot and left to die. (Since the beginning of the land invasions, poaching has finished off much of Zimbabwe's wildlife.) Edwards said that the culprits were believed to be poachers who would sell the horns to the Chinese miners who had recently moved into the area; powdered rhino horn is prized as an aphrodisiac in China. A couple of miles away, a Chinese-run nickel-mining camp had sprung up on a friend's confiscated land. The camp straddled a public-access dirt road that traversed the area, and we slowly drove through it. Chinese men wearing floppy hats and sunglasses were overseeing several dozen black Zimbabwean workers in blue overalls; there were Caterpillars, and rock-sifting machines, and newly erected workers' dormitories. As we drove past, the Chinese men stopped to glare at us. In the distance, we heard explosions.

On September 25th, a few weeks after I left Zimbabwe, I went to see Mugabe address the United Nations General Assembly, in New York. An audible buzz of anticipation filled the hall as he approached the podium. He was reported to have come to New York with an entourage of fifty-four people, including his wife, Grace, but, despite the tentative power-sharing deal, without Morgan Tsvangirai, whose passport was being held by the authorities.

Dressed in an elegant black suit and a mauve tie, and enunciating carefully in quaintly outmoded colonial English, Mugabe spoke of the need to eradicate global poverty, and in favor of "sustainable development" and "empowerment programs" to attain social justice and political stability. He singled out his own land-reform program for praise: Zimbabweans, he said, were now "masters of their own destiny," their progress hindered only by "illegal, unilaterally imposed sanctions." Mugabe proceeded to excoriate the U.S. and Great Britain for the war in Iraq. "Those who falsely accuse us of violations are themselves international perpetrators of genocide, acts of aggression, and mass destruction," he said.

In the press gallery, an African man began clapping loudly, particularly at criticisms of the U.S. When Mugabe's speech ended, a few moments later, the man was joined by twenty or thirty others—journalists from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—who gave Mugabe a sustained round of applause. ♦

## A CRITIC AT LARGE

# METHOD MAN

*How the greatest American actor lost his way.*

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

In the midst of Broadway's "victory season," in March, 1946, an outraged ad denouncing the critics appeared in the *Times*. Signed by the production team of Elia Kazan and Harold Clurman, the ad failed to save their drama about returning vets, "Truckline Café," from closing after a mere thirteen performances. But the play has gone down in history, thanks to a five-minute speech made by a little-known actor in a secondary role: Marlon Brando, at twenty-one, played an ex-G.I. who comes home to find that his wife has been unfaithful; in his final scene, he entered exhausted and wringing wet, and confessed that he had killed her and carried her body out to sea. Karl Malden, who played another minor role, reported that the rest of the cast sometimes had to wait for nearly two minutes after Brando's exit while the audience screamed and stamped its feet. The performance was as remarkable for what Brando didn't do as for what he did. Pauline Kael, very young herself and years away from a critical career, happened to come late to the play one evening and recalled that she averted her eyes, in embarrassment, from what appeared to be a man having a seizure onstage: it wasn't until her companion "grabbed my arm and said 'Watch this guy!' that I realized he was *acting*."

The dismal fate of "Truckline Café" inspired Kazan to form the Actors Studio. Of the entire cast, only Brando and Malden had given the kind of performance that he and Clurman wanted: natural and psychologically acute, as contemporary American plays required. Their ideal of acting derived from their days in the Group Theatre, which had flourished in the thirties with brashly vernacular and politically conscious plays—Clifford Odets's "Waiting for Lefty" was its first big hit—in which ordinary people were portrayed in a startlingly realistic style. (Group actors were so authentic that it was sometimes difficult to understand what they were saying.) This revolution in acting grew from Stanislavsky's accounts of his performances with the Moscow Art Theatre—an approach eventually known simply as the Method—and, in its quest for onstage honesty, replaced traditional theatrical training with exercises designed to stir up personal memories, refine powers of observation, and free the imagination through improvisation. The Group's larger goal was an anti-Broadway, anti-commercial theatre of power and relevance. For the actors, the goal was a paradox: real emotion, produced on cue.

Although the Group had disbanded by the time Brando arrived in New York, in 1943, he soon began taking classes with a charter member, Stella Adler, who had actually studied with Stanislavsky, and whom he credited as his teacher to the end of his life. ("She taught me to be real," he wrote, "and not to try to act out an emotion I didn't personally experience during a performance.") Adler seems to have taken less than a week to decide that the brooding nineteen-year-old in the torn bluejeans and the dirty T-shirt was going to become "America's finest actor," but she always denied that she had taught him a thing. As his fellow-student Elaine Stritch later remarked, "Marlon's going to class to learn the Method was like sending a tiger to jungle school."

Yet Brando's early rehearsals for "Truckline Café" had been disastrous. He mumbled his lines and could not be heard past the fifth row; Kazan, who was producing, worried that Adler—who was, not incidentally, married to Clurman—had made claims that her protégé could not fulfill. But Clurman, who was directing, sensed that the fledgling actor was nearly choked with feeling, and pushed until he got him to explode. As it turned out, that Broadway season was the first sign of a momentous transition in the art, if not the business, of acting: *Variety's* annual poll named Laurence Olivier Best Actor for playing Shakespeare and Sophocles on tour with England's Old Vic; Brando, in a forgettable play, won Most Promising Young Actor and was out of work as soon as it closed. But he had learned from all his early mentors that even in America, deprived of Shakespeare and Sophocles, theatre was a morally serious enterprise that treated life's important themes. And so, after an awkward stint in Shaw's "Candida," the Most Promising Young Actor turned down Noël Coward's "Present Laughter," imperiously demanding, "Don't you know there are people starving in Europe?" He turned down a seven-year contract at three thousand dollars a week with M-G-M. Instead, in the fall of 1946, he chose to do a play that Ben Hecht had devised to raise money for transporting Jewish refugees from Europe to Palestine, during which he shouted at the cowering audience, "Where were you when six million Jews were being burned to death in the ovens of Auschwitz?" It may not have been art, but a lot of people filled out the donation forms inserted in their programs.

Brando was no one's first choice when, the following summer, a great American play finally came along. Tennessee Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire" was the story of a highly sexed and poorly spoken middle-aged Polish-American man named Stanley Kowalski—another vet with a violent streak—who rapes an emotionally fragile and aristocratic woman, Blanche DuBois. The play's cautionary theme was described by Williams, who strongly identified with Blanche, as "the apes will inherit the earth." Kazan was scheduled to direct, Irene Mayer Selznick to produce, and all agreed that John Garfield, not only a movie star but a street-talking graduate of the Group Theatre, was the right choice for their antihero. It was only when Garfield made impossible demands that Kazan, scanning his "beginners" class at the Actors Studio, decided to take a risk

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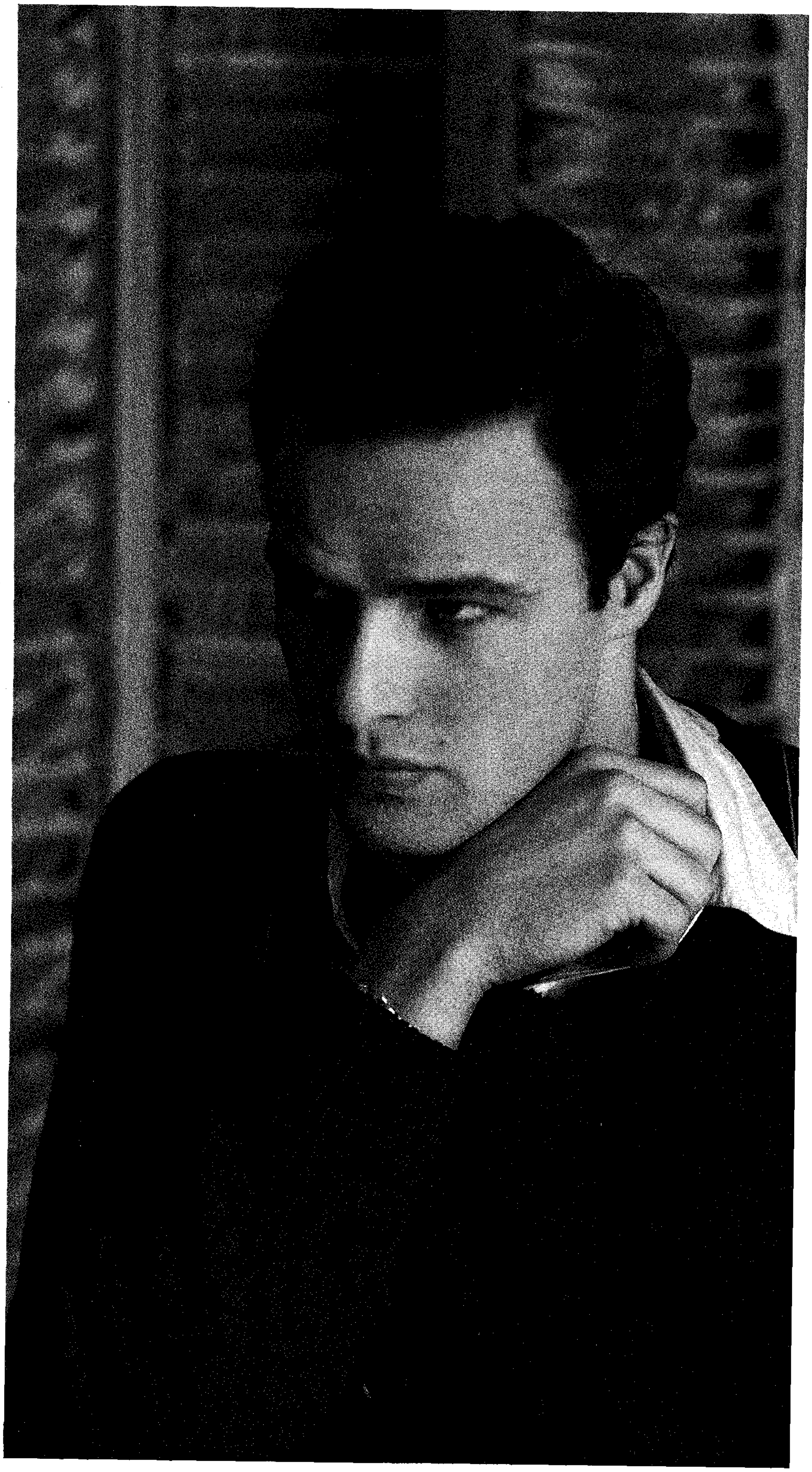
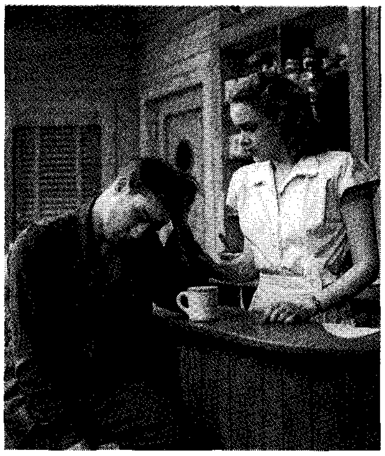


*Marlon Brando in 1948, when he played in "A Streetcar Named Desire," on Broadway. Ph*



on Brando, even though he was too young for the role. Auditioning for Williams, Brando was like lightning: electric and illuminating. Not only did he have the sexual power the play required; he provided the key to redressing what Williams had worried was the too easy moral imbalance of his work. Precisely because he was barely twenty-three, Brando humanized the vengeful Stanley, reducing his willful destructiveness to what Williams excitedly described as "the brutality or callousness of youth." Good and evil were now more subtly matched: it would not be so easy to take sides. Brando was not as sure as Williams that he was a "God-sent Stanley." He worked slowly, and seemed to find it difficult to learn his lines; Selznick repeatedly complained that she couldn't hear him. But Kazan had faith, and so did Williams, whose opening-night telegram to Brando predicted, "From the greasy Polack you will someday arrive at the gloomy Dane."

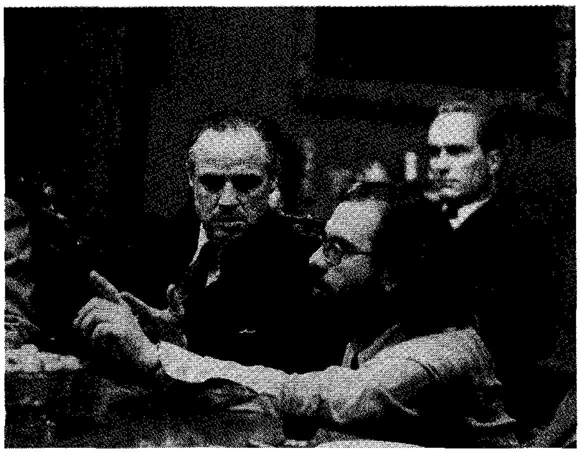
By then, Kazan was almost rueful that the play, which Williams had built around the character of Blanche, was looking like "the Marlon Brando Show." Without changing a word, the actor seemed to have expanded the role and turned Williams's original meaning upside down. Jessica Tandy, the British actress who played Blanche, was furious that the audience laughed along with Stanley's jokes at her expense—as though he were a regular guy putting an uppity woman in her place—and stunned that it openly extended its sympathies more to the executioner than to his victim. The reason was not just Brando's youth: it was the comic innocence that fuelled the gibes, the baffled tenderness beneath the toughness. The face above the heavily muscled body was angelic; the pain he showed when he broke down and wailed for his wife was searing, elemental. And his intensity was almost unbearable. One critic wrote that "Brando seems always on the verge of tearing down the proscenium with his bare hands." "Streetcar" was an enormous hit and Tandy received excellent notices, but it was Brando the audiences loved. More, theatre people recognized him as the long-promised revolution in the flesh. In Kazan's view, others were giving fine performances but Brando was "living onstage"—with the result that he longed to escape the play after only a few weeks. How many times, on schedule, can one rip oneself apart?

He had a contract, however, which kept him smashing dishes and wailing his soul out for a year and a half, during which his performance varied tremendously from night to night. Free at last, in late 1949, he ended up in Hollywood, where he cheerfully antagonized the local monarchs (Louella Parsons wrote that he had "the gall of a Kinsey researcher") and announced that he would soon be returning to the stage. He was nevertheless excited about his first film, "The Men," an uplifting Stanley Kramer production about a paralyzed veteran whose faithful fiancée draws him out of despair and into life. Although the film did not do well—the subject of wounded veterans lost its fascination as the Korean War began—Brando's reviews tended toward ecstatic variations on the word "real." And he became known for a correspondingly real if peculiar way of working: publicity stressed that he had spent three weeks living in a veterans' hospital among paraplegics, learning how they moved and what they felt. On the set, the slow perfectionism of his endless retakes caused a co-star to grumble about "New York acting"—which was exactly what Kazan wanted when, in 1950, he began filming "Streetcar."

With the exception of Vivien Leigh, as Blanche, all of the film's major cast members had been part of the Broadway production, and hardly needed to do more than get reacquainted with their roles. Kazan, however, disliked repeating himself as much as Brando did, and he seized on Leigh's sublime fragility as a way to turn the play around again, and to restore something like Williams's original moral balance. Brando, who had always thought that Tandy was miscast, felt that Leigh was truly Williams's "wounded butterfly," and reacted with an emotional and sexual charge beyond anything he had shown onstage. Seen against this tragically sympathetic Blanche, however, Stanley's brutality was harder to tolerate; if he was not a villain, he was an extremely charming monster, and the audience was uncomfortably implicated in Blanche's destruction by its early laughter and its deep attraction to him. Brando was nominated for an Academy Award (and so was Leigh, who won). Yet, as a result of the uncanny life he put into the slouching, scratching, sweating performance, his tabloid antics, and probably some public confusion about the much touted Method—did it mean an actor was just playing himself?—he was widely described as what he resentfully called "a blue-jeaned slobbermouth," and dubbed "the Neanderthal man."

This was not the only reason that Brando hated Stanley, whom he spoke of with a disgust not unlike that felt by Blanche DuBois. In his next film, "Viva

LEFT TO RIGHT: KOBAL COLLECTION; WARNER BROS/NEAL PETERS COLLECTION; SUNSHINE/RETNA



*From left: Brando in "Truckline Café"; in "A Streetcar Named Desire"; on the set of "On the Waterfront"; winning the Oscar for "Waterfront"; and on the set of "The Godfather."*

Zapata," a socially worthy effort (directed by Kazan) about an idealistic revolutionary, he virtually disappeared behind heavy "Mexican" makeup and a matching accent. Although this display of range won him another Academy Award nomination, the announcement that he was going to play Mark Antony in "Julius Caesar" was greeted most joyously by the nation's comedians, who lost no time declaiming "Friends, Romans, countrymen" in a nasal, Kowalskian bleat. Brando himself was worried about appearing a fool. Although he was an avid reader and memorizer of Shakespeare, his performing experience had been confined to an acting-school production of "Twelfth Night" and, more recently, to taunting Vivien Leigh—then Mrs. Laurence Olivier—with a nastily precise imitation of Olivier's Agincourt speech from "Henry V." The director of "Julius Caesar," Joseph Mankiewicz, came upon his star studying tapes of speeches by Olivier, John Barrymore, and Maurice Evans, and complained that the genteel result made him sound more like June Allyson. Brando later explained that the most daunting aspect of playing Shakespeare was relying on the written text, since he had learned to search around and under words—in pauses, in gestures, in grunts and mumbles, even in silence—for a sense of truth.

Once on the "Caesar" set, in 1952, he asked John Gielgud, who was playing Cassius, to make him a recording of Antony's speeches, presumably as a model of diction and prosodic stress. Brando admired Gielgud, but there is not a trace of the British actor's stylized and vibrato-laden music in the young American's stark and driven reading. To accord with the rest of the cast, Brando adopted a British accent, but the way he inflected his lines was so unexpected and so commonsensical that the most familiar phrases took on a natural urgency ("*Lend* me your ears!") and much of the rest seemed nearly made up on the spot, as when the hint of a stutter causes him to falter in his plea: "Bear with me, my heart is in the coffin there with Caesar and I must p-pause till it come back to me." Reviewers were thrilled—there was great pride in the thought that an American Olivier might be at hand—and he was nominated for yet another Academy Award. Gielgud was sufficiently impressed to ask his would-be pupil to participate in a theatre season he was directing in England, where Brando could fulfill Tennessee Williams's prediction and play Hamlet. Brando turned him down. He seems to have been the only person who did not believe that he was up to the test.

Instead, he did a biker movie. It was meant to be another socially conscious film, based on an incident that had taken place in 1947, when a motorcycle gang terrorized a California town. Brando said he hoped that the film would explore the reasons that young people were resorting to antisocial behavior; in fact, juvenile delinquency had become such a huge concern that a Senate subcommittee was investigating its causes. "The Wild One," released in December, 1953, did not so much explore the causes as define the era's terms of opposition: jive-talking hipsters versus squares, leather jackets versus shirts and ties, easy-riding freedom versus the straight and narrow. Youth versus age. A mediocre film, it was just enough ahead of its time to strike a nerve: Jack Kerouac was struggling to get his book about his adventures on the road published (once it appeared, he begged Brando to make the movie); Elvis was a year away from appearing on national TV and being called "a guitar-playing Marlon Brando." Brando's Johnny, the leader of the pack, was an antidote to that other mythic figure of the fifties, the deadeningly conformist Man in the Gray Flannel Suit. But, as with Stanley Kowalski, the actor was indistinguishable from the role, and Brando himself came to embody the rebel myth. The script gave a hint of the pain behind Johnny's steely cool, but his anger and dissatisfaction were unrelenting. Unlike the tough-guy heroes of the forties, with their ulterior noble causes—unlike, say, Bogart in "Casablanca"—Johnny had no idea what he really wanted. In the film's most quoted line, someone asks, "Hey, Johnny, what are you rebelling against?" And Brando answers, deadpan, "Whaddya got?"

What was real about the realest actor of them all? What did he draw on during those improvisations or rehearsals when, by training and by instinct, to go farther he had to go within? "The torment that underlay Brando's art is the subject of this book," Stefan Kanfer begins "Somebody: The Reckless Life and Remarkable Career of Marlon Brando"—the first biography to appear since Brando's death, at eighty, in 2004—because, as Kanfer explains, "the man's internal anguish was what drove him on to the heights of his vocation." Examining a career that spanned more than five decades and thirty-eight films, Kanfer maintains that Brando, unique among actors,

LEFT: GEORGE SILK/TIME LIFE/GETTY; RIGHT: STEVE SCHAPIRO

“worked without a mask.” While other actors preserve boundary lines between their private lives and their performances, “no such boundary existed between Brando the actor and Brando the man,” both of whom apparently suffered from what Kanfer, assisted by several psychiatrists, labels “oppositional defiant disorder,” “narcissistic personality disorder,” and an “oral fixation.” This is not entirely news: long ago Harold Clurman wrote that Brando’s acting had “its source in suffering,” and Peter Manso, the author of a previous biography, consulted his own set of psychiatrists to diagnose the actor’s “dissociated personality,” “manic-depressive mood swings,” and “anxieties over sexual identity,” among other afflictions. (Brando appears to have slept with an uncertain number of men and a staggering number of women during his life.) But nothing has approached Kanfer’s assertion that the “Rosebud in Brando’s life” was “the mental illness that had dogged him for decades,” an illness that made his achievements all the more a marvel and his failures no surprise.

Brando might have agreed. In his later years, he told his story and freely explained its impact, starting with the fact that he was born in 1924 in Omaha, Nebraska, to a mother who “abandoned me for a bottle when I was little more than an infant,” and who proceeded to drink his childhood away; his father was an alcoholic, too, although in his case the larger problem was his failure to show his son any affection or approval. His two sisters provided some support, and a young nursemaid provided something like love, but she left one day without saying goodbye: he had been abandoned twice over, and, he wrote, “my world collapsed.” He flunked kindergarten, and did little better in school as the years progressed. He stammered badly, and he seems to have been dyslexic, so that reading out loud in class was an agony; some who knew him at the time suggested, in interviews with Manso, that this was the source of the famous pauses and obscuring mumble. Always the class bad boy, he was thrown out of the military school that was supposed to teach him discipline. Aside from sports, and despite his early speech problems, drama was the only subject in which he excelled.

Acting, which by another method might have provided an escape, was for him a way of sounding out his depths; he described his work with Adler as “psychotherapeutic,” teaching him not only about theatre but about himself. During his early New York years, his mother came to live with him for a time—she was an aspiring actress and a poetical soul, something of a Blanche DuBois—and when she returned to his father Brando confessed that he had a nervous breakdown. By the time he was in “Streetcar,” the panic attacks had got so bad, and he was so afraid that in his anger he might kill someone, that he began to see a psychiatrist recommended by Kazan. Five years later, in 1953, he told Kazan that the only reason he had agreed to do “On the Waterfront” was that the New Jersey location allowed him to be near his psychiatrist; his contract included the right to leave early every afternoon to make his session.

Brando had initially refused to appear in “On the Waterfront,” out of shock and disappointment that Kazan—whom he claimed was the best director he ever worked with—had testified as a “friendly” witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee, not only confessing his former membership in the Communist Party but betraying old Group Theatre friends. Kazan later admitted that the movie had been an attempt to excuse and even glorify his actions—or, as Brando put it, an attempt to justify “finking” on his friends. In the scenario, the naïve ex-boxer Terry Malloy slowly realizes that it is his moral duty to inform on his gangster friends before a government commission: this courageous act makes him a man and a hero. It is doubtful that many viewers saw a connection between Communists and mobsters, but the film’s emotional grip and its unprecedented visual authenticity made it a triumph.

Shot on the Hoboken piers during a freezing winter, with a cast drawn almost entirely from the Actors Studio, and backed by a population of authentically worn longshoremen, “On the Waterfront” signalled a new sort of anti-Hollywood, neorealistic style of filmmaking; no less than the revolutionary painters across the Hudson, Kazan and company could have been called the New York school. But the film’s success was also due to Brando, who by all reports invented Terry as much as played him, freely altering words and scenes with an infallible sense of what the gentle, tortured boy would do. Kazan, who called this performance the best ever given by a man in American film, spoke of the importance of Brando’s having been able to draw on his own “pain,” “self-doubt,” and “inner conflict,” but he also wrote of the actor’s professionalism and exceptional talent—without which no amount of anguish could have done the job. As for Brando, he said it was “so cold out there that you couldn’t overact.”

“On the Waterfront” won eight Academy Awards—including Oscars for Brando and Kazan—yet it proved not the start of something but the end. No independent school of film developed from it, and the crassness of Hollywood only seemed to worsen as the studios struggled against the new menace of television, wooing audiences through sheer color and spectacle. Brando, who had let down his guard enough to sign a two-picture deal, was assigned to a bloated historical epic titled “The Egyptian,” which he fled as shooting began. Sued by the studio for two million dollars, he was officially released from the picture only after his mother died suddenly, in March, 1954, and he agreed instead to play Napoleon in another historical turkey, “Désirée”; on its release, he announced that he had let his makeup play the part. *Time*, in a cover story that featured Brando in his Napoleonic beaky nose and epaulets, focussed on the significance of this notably insignificant film: if Brando cared about acting as an art, what was there for him in Hollywood? Yet returning to the stage was no more promising, since Broadway rarely produced first-rate work, and “there is no U.S. repertory theater in which a young actor can try the great roles for size.” Compared with the careers of his European counterparts (Olivier, of course, or Jean-Louis Barrault, in France), even the roles he had already played were sadly limited, so many being “variations on the Kowalski theme.” These questions recurred with every film that Brando made for the next eighteen years. Here at last was the great American actor: not a copy of a British actor or a mere matinée idol but someone original, contemporary, and uniquely representative of the culture. But what could the culture produce for him to do?

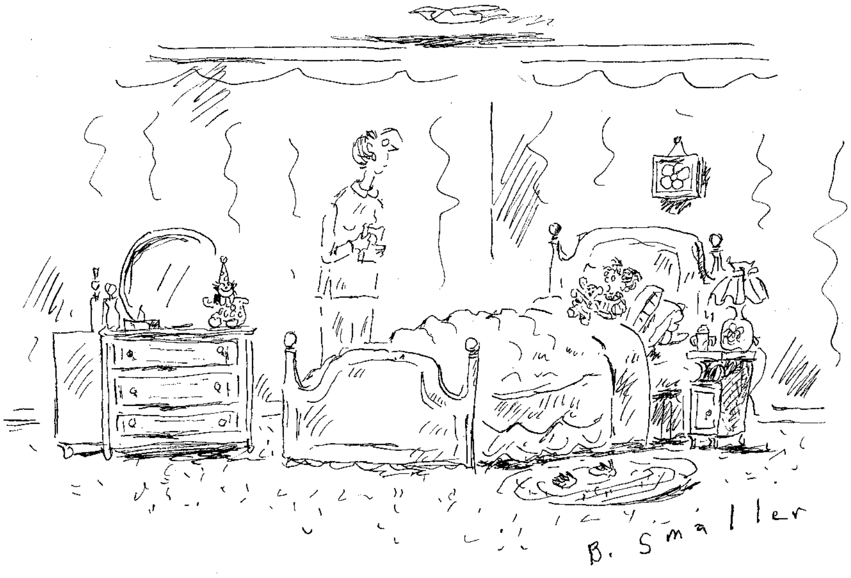
The answer was "Guys and Dolls," "The Teahouse of the August Moon," "Sayonara," "The Young Lions," "The Fugitive Kind," "One-Eyed Jacks," and "*Mutiny on the Bounty*," just to bring his career into the sixties. One can hardly doubt his desire to break away from the "Kowalski theme." He played an elegant gangster who sang (a little), a Japanese servant, an American officer, a Nazi officer, a Southern stud, a frontier bandit, and an aristocratic British fop. He even directed, in the case of "One-Eyed Jacks," a bizarrely Oedipal Western that seems almost an illustration of Kanfer's thesis: a villain named Dad betrays the hero (Brando as Rio the Kid, inevitably called the Kid), prompting a consuming desire for revenge; although Dad further punishes the Kid with a vicious whipping, the Kid ultimately succeeds and shoots Dad dead. It was the first film made by Brando's production company, Pennebaker Productions, established in 1955 under his mother's maiden name, and with his father as chief employee—a standard Hollywood tax shelter that he dedicated to making "important" films of "social value." Pennebaker produced very few films during its existence, but this idealism pervaded Brando's work, and he now had the power to have scripts rewritten and characters refashioned to make his points: at his insistence, the Nazi of "The Young Lions" saw the error of his ways and rose to ethical enlightenment; the Pinkerton-like soldier of "Sayonara" overcame society's racism and married the Japanese woman he loved. Through the immeasurable influence of movies, Brando believed that he might also help to refashion reality.

With such lofty goals, however, every project was sooner or later a disappointment. In response to his frustrations, he made trouble on the set, he refused to learn his lines, he ate so compulsively that he had to be fitted with new costumes in ever larger sizes—the line between self-indulgence and self-contempt becomes difficult to locate. And he cost the studios a fortune, as movie after movie failed. Yet the face on the screen was so compelling that the question of what to do with his talent remained a kind of national burden. Truman Capote, in a scathing profile from the late fifties, portrayed the actor as a bore and a poseur, yet pressed him earnestly about when he would return to play the "Mount Everest roles in stage literature." By the late sixties, Pauline Kael, her hopes for his career seriously battered, noted that "his greatness is in a range that is too disturbing to be encompassed by regular movies." But what other kind was there?

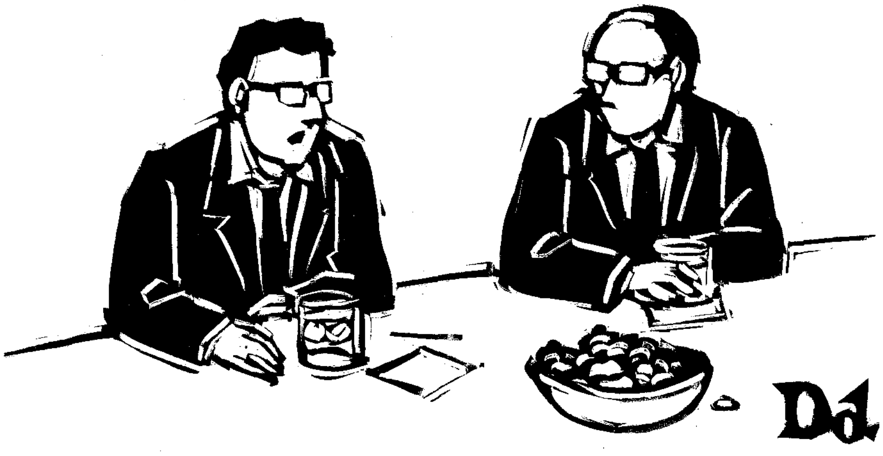
Brando had good reasons for choosing many of his films in these bleak years: "The Ugly American" and "Burn!" revolved around serious political issues; there was an accomplished young director, Arthur Penn, behind "The Chase," and a legendary director, Charlie Chaplin, behind "A Countess from Hong Kong"; "Reflections in a Golden Eye" offered the image-shattering role of a stiffly repressed homosexual Army officer. His performances ranged from as good as possible in deadly circumstances ("The Chase," "A Countess from Hong Kong") to brilliant ("Golden Eye"), but there has been no other career that so clearly illustrates how complex a work of art a movie really is, and how many forces it requires—of whatever genius—to make it right.

Even when his pictures were plainly bad, he strained to hold on to some purpose—he fought against the usual Indian stereotypes in the cowboy movie "The Appaloosa"—but his sense of accomplishment no longer had much to do with his work, outside of earning the money required to support two ex-wives, a third wife who had been his Tahitian co-star in "Mutiny on the Bounty," and a growing number of children. Avowedly searching for meaning in his life, in 1963 he became a vocal supporter of the civil-rights movement, raising money for Martin Luther King, Jr., and joining the march on Washington. It was easy to assume that he was nothing but a political dilettante, particularly after he got involved with the Black Panthers—Bobby Seale, it turned out, was a big fan of "The Wild One"—and he was frequently criticized for being distracted, and for disappearing to a private atoll he had purchased in Tahiti. There is no doubt, however, that he was deeply affected when King was shot, in 1968, and he probably meant it when he announced that he was quitting film entirely to work for civil rights. But by then it was more accurate to say that the movies were quitting him. With the failure of the incendiary "Burn!" at the box office, in 1969, he completed a full decade of commercial flops. He was, in his own words, "washed up and unemployable," when Mario Puzo called.

Puzo had Brando in mind all the while he was writing "The Godfather," which was optioned by Paramount before he finished the book. Only Brando, he said, could bring the "quiet force and irony" that he wanted to Don Corleone, family patriarch and honorable killer. Although studio executives refused to consider him, the young director they hired for what they thought of as a low-budget gangster



*"I'm worried about a monster under my bed, and I'm worried about college."*



*"Am I a white man in a red state voting for a black President, or a blue man in a white state voting for a green President?"*

film, Francis Ford Coppola, had grander things in mind, and argued that the Don ought to be played by one of the two greatest actors alive: Olivier or Brando. Since Olivier was too ill to work, Coppola conspired with Brando to overcome Paramount's qualms. Brando even agreed to do a screen test, mostly to show that, at forty-seven, he was capable of aging the required twenty years. He stuffed his cheeks to create jowls ("the face of a bull dog," he said with satisfaction, "mean-looking, but warm underneath") and devised a light, unthreatening voice based on tapes of the mobster Frank Costello: real power makes other people lean in to listen. Yet he could not or would not remember his lines. He wrote them on his cuffs, he kept cue cards stuck all over the set. When challenged by Coppola, he claimed that this was necessary for his spontaneity: "Real people don't know what they're going to say. Their words often come as a surprise to them. That's the way it should be in a movie." Whether or not this was really his reason, it worked. Brando's improvisatory touches are among the most memorable aspects of the character: stopping to smell a rose as he denies being a murderer, suddenly slapping a whining younger man, molding an orange peel into a set of fangs when the Don plays with his grandchild in a summer garden. None of this was in the script but simply happened when the cameras rolled. Although Coppola says that Brando never asked for changes in the dialogue, he apparently made his feelings about it known, complaining at one point—as if looking back on the hero he had played so often—"Just once, I would like to see this man *not* inarticulate. I would like to see him express himself well."

"The Godfather" was not only Brando's redemption but Hollywood's, proving that a big commercial movie could be a work of beauty and significance. It was an American epic, and, for a time, at least, it took the oxymoronic sting out of the term "mass culture." Everyone agreed that it was the kind of film Brando should have been making all along. At the other end of the populist spectrum, so was his next picture, "Last Tango in Paris," a European art film that used simulated sex and a veneer of existential chic to do for porn what "The Godfather" did for cops and robbers. The director, Bernardo Bertolucci, crafted the role just for Brando. Or, rather, he asked Brando to craft the role: "He wanted me to play myself, to improvise completely and portray Paul"—an American expatriate in Paris, who falls into an intense affair with a beautiful girl—"as if he were an autobiographical mirror of me." Brando was more than willing to oblige. So when Paul tells the girl that "my father was a drunk, tough, whore-fucker, bar fighter" and "my mother was very very poetic and also a drunk," the life Brando was exposing was his own, and he seems to have arrived at the precise crossing between the Method and psychoanalysis. The result, made all the more exciting by having been banned for obscenity in Italy, was greeted as a distinctly modern masterpiece. Pauline Kael compared its première to that of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," and declared Brando's performance the fulfillment of his non-acting acting in "Truckline Café," twenty-six years before. "Paul feels so 'real' and the character is brought so close," she wrote, "that a new dimension in screen acting has been reached."

"The Godfather" was released in the spring of 1972, and "Last Tango" premièred at the New York Film Festival that fall. It was a double tour de force, the Italian grandpa followed by the art-house stud, and Brando brought the old intensity and a mournful new dignity to both. Perhaps he should have stopped there; for a while, it seemed that he would. He followed his notorious rejection of his Academy Award for "The Godfather," when he had an Apache woman give a speech about Hollywood's mistreatment of Indians, with three years immersed in Indian causes. He talked about making a movie about Indian history, but it never went anywhere, and when he returned to what Kael had called "regular" films—bad scripts, no scripts, no one to control him—some final link of discipline was gone. He was getting enormous fees, but his performance in the incoherent "Missouri Breaks" was campy, edged with contempt; by the time of "Apocalypse Now," in 1979, he had gained so much weight that Tennessee Williams suggested that he was being paid by the pound. Brando later wrote that the emotional delving of "Last Tango" had been so devastating that "in subsequent pictures I stopped trying to experience the emotions of my characters" and began "simply to act the part in a technical way." He was certain that "the audience doesn't know the difference." It is impossible to know if he was trying to explain or merely to justify what he had become. In 1980, playing a fat old oil tycoon in "The Formula," he wore a radio transmitter disguised as a hearing aid; past even the bother of using cue cards, he now had his lines read directly into his ears.

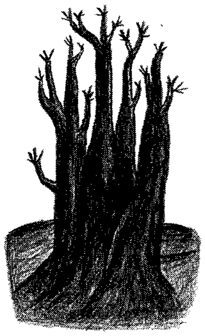
For the rest of the decade, Brando played only one small role, in a single film, "A Dry White Season," about South African apartheid. He did it for scale: roughly four thousand dollars. The rest of the time, "I was content doing other things: traveling, searching, exploring, seeking." At home in Beverly Hills, he saw a psychiatrist several times a week, slowly learning to "be the child I never had a chance to be." At the same time, divorced again and the father of nine (by his own count; the actual number is uncertain), he was trying "to get to know my children better." The efforts involved in these two ventures—becoming a child, becoming a father—were rarely compatible. It can hardly be a surprise that Brando's children had childhoods apparently no happier than his own. His oldest son, Christian, had been hooked on drugs and alcohol since his teens, and had dropped out of high school; in his new attempt at closeness, Brando proposed that they get their high-school degrees together—Brando was sixty-three, Christian twenty-eight—but Brando could not keep up and let the project go. A similar fate attended all the utopian projects he dreamed up for his Tahiti paradise: it was going to be a gathering place for artists and intellectuals; there would be ecological experiments leading to breakthroughs in solar and wind power; hired scientists would find a way to process algae into a protein supplement for Third World nations. Instead, he watched his expensive equipment rust and his plans crumble. Discussing poetry with an interviewer there one day—"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" had come up—he remarked, "If the mermaids can't sing for me here, Christ, they never will."

In 1990, Christian Brando shot his pregnant half sister's Tahitian boyfriend—point-blank, from behind, in the head—in the den of his father's Beverly Hills house. The trial hypnotized the press, and some (including the father of the dead boy) considered Papa Brando's performance on the witness stand one of the best he ever gave: sobbing, dazed, and often incoherent, he was wretchedly apologetic for what he swore had been a terrible accident. In the end, Christian pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and received a ten-year sentence. Brando, saddled with enormous legal bills, went to work on his autobiography.

The fee for the book was reportedly five million dollars; his first stipulation was that it should contain nothing about his films (not important enough) or his marriages and children. Although he was prevailed upon to discuss the films, the central irrepressible subject of "Songs My Mother Taught Me," which appeared in 1994, was his childhood and what might be called the psychiatric life that followed from it. Sadly, even his best impulses are reduced to the language of the couch: "Frustrated in my attempts to take care of my mother, I suppose that instead I tried to help Indians, blacks and Jews." His comments about acting are striking, however, whether for the scant respect he pays his own accomplishments—"for me to walk onto a movie set and play Mark Antony without more experience was asinine"—or his dismissal of Hollywood's domination of international film and television as "a tragedy." But, beyond the seventy-year-old unloved child's self-denigration, it is worth considering Brando's argument that in some sense his entire career was a mistake.

"Generally actors don't realize how deeply affected the technique of acting was by the fact that Stella went to Russia and studied with Stanislavsky," Brando writes about his beloved teacher, Stella Adler, a half century after he studied with her in New York. And he adds, modestly, "Virtually all acting in motion pictures today stems from her." Of course, most actors would say that it stems from Brando: the man who brought those slightly incredible theories about realism and honesty and a new kind of art to the screen. And none of the awful films besides the glorious six or eight that are his primary legacy have done any damage to his example or his reputation. He is the begetter of a tradition that extends from James Dean ("Mr. Dean appears to be wearing my last year's wardrobe," Brando sneered on the release of Dean's first film, in 1955, "and using my last year's talent") to Robert De Niro and Al Pacino and beyond. Jack Nicholson, speaking for American actors, said, "He gave us our freedom." But Brando's thoughts on his heritage continue: "This school of acting served the American theater and motion pictures well, but it was restricting." For all the gains, something essential had been lost, or, rather, was never given a chance to develop: an American capacity "to present Shakespeare or classical drama of any kind satisfactorily." The single contemporary performance that Brando discusses with rapt admiration is Kenneth Branagh's "Henry V." "In America we are unable to approach such refinements," he writes. "We simply do not have the style, the regard for language, or the cultural disposition." And we are probably farther from it after Brando than we were before. Stella Adler, speaking late in life about the roles her former protégé had *not* played, replied to a question about whether Brando was indeed a great actor, "We'll never know."

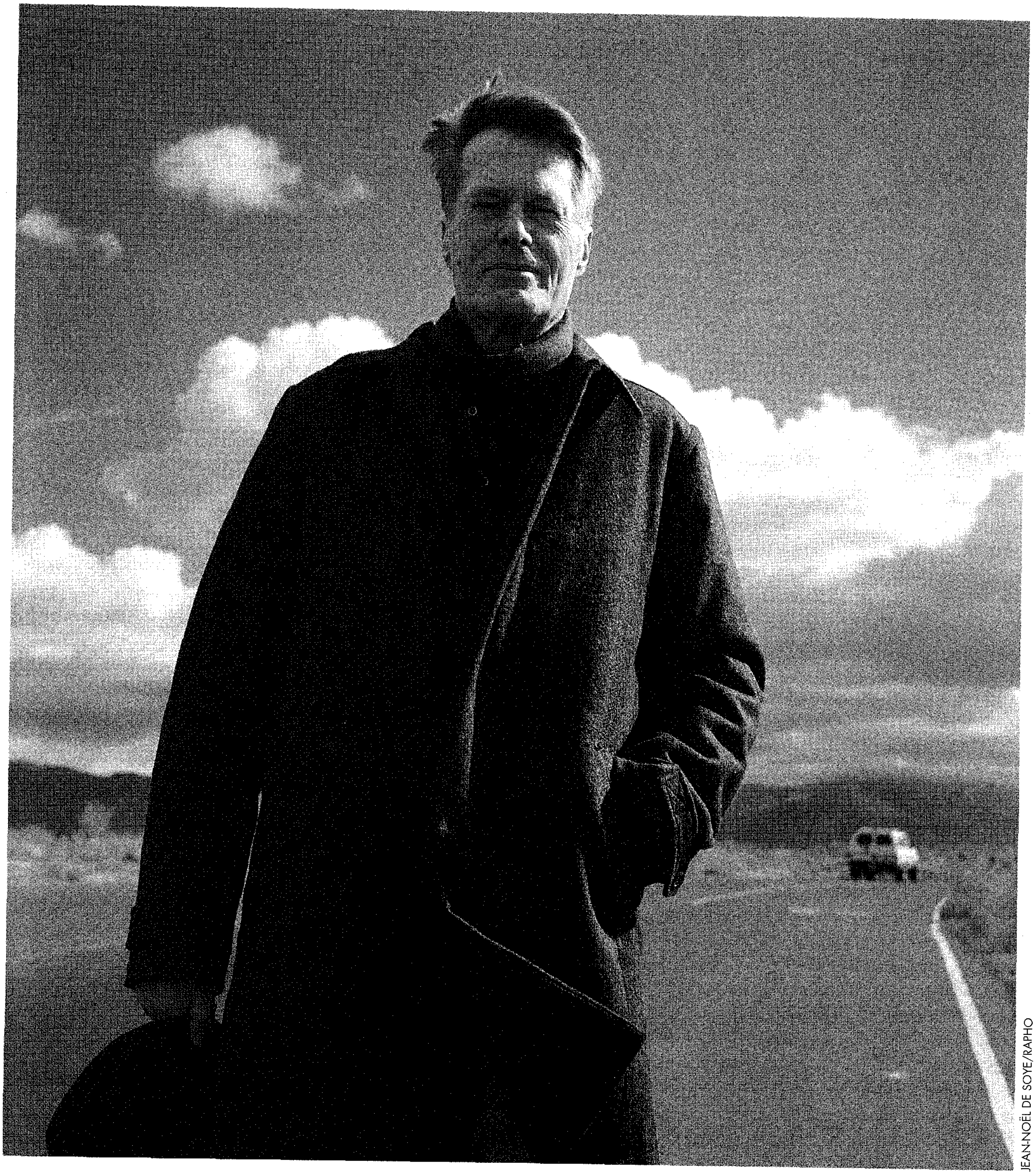
Yet there was a way in which the contrasting styles were in accord, a deeper and more satisfying truth about truth in acting. "If you're not good at improv you're not an actor," Brando insisted in his last major interview, with *Rolling Stone*, in 2002, just two years before his death. He had been teaching an acting workshop—with assistance from Leonardo DiCaprio and Sean Penn—to a select group that included the tightrope walker Philippe Petit, one of Michael Jackson's bodyguards, several local acting students, and a man he'd found rummaging through the trash outside the studio. He was putting the group through a lot of improvisations, and, for the first time in years, he was enjoying his work. Still talking about improv, he informed the interviewer of another source for the tradition that he had unwittingly founded. "There's a speech from 'Hamlet' that applies to all artists," he explained, "but it certainly applies to actors: " '*To hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature.*' To be natural." Didn't this sum up the lessons he was trying to pass on? And then, against every expectation about who he was and what he stood for, Brando backed up a few lines and launched into Hamlet's soliloquy—Act III, Scene 2—from memory: "*Let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature.*" "And it goes on," Brando told the guy from *Rolling Stone*. "It says it all." ♦



FICTION

# THE BOY WHO HAD NEVER SEEN THE SEA

BY J.M.G. LE CLÉZIO



JEAN-NOËL DE SOYE/RAPHO

He was called Daniel, but he would have liked to be called Sinbad, because he had read about Sinbad's adventures in the big red leather-bound book he always carried with him, to class and to the dormitory. In fact, I think it was the only book he'd read. He didn't talk about it, except occasionally, when someone asked him directly. Then his black eyes would shine even brighter, and his knife blade of a face would suddenly come to life. But he was a boy who didn't speak much in general. He never joined the conversations of others, unless the discussion involved the sea or travels. Most men are men of the land; that's just the way it is. They are born on the land, and it's the land and the things of the land that interest them. Even sailors are often men of the land: they like houses and women; they talk about politics and cars. But this boy, Daniel—it was as if he belonged to another race. Terrestrial things bored him—stores, cars, music, movies, and, of course, his schoolwork. He didn't talk about it; he didn't even yawn to express his boredom. He'd just sit in one spot—on a bench or on the stairs overlooking the courtyard—and stare into space. He was a mediocre student, who did only the work he needed to get by. When a teacher called his name, he stood and recited the lesson, then he sat down again and that was that. It was as if he were sleeping with his eyes open.

Even when we talked about the sea, the conversation didn't interest him for long. He'd listen for a moment, ask a question or two, then realize that we were talking not about the sea but about swimming or deep-sea fishing, about beaches or sunbathing. And off he'd go, to his bench or the stairs, and stare into space again. That wasn't the sea he wanted to hear about. He was interested in a different sea—we didn't know which one, but a different one.

This, of course, was before he disappeared, before he took off. No one ever imagined that he'd leave one day, and I mean *really* leave, and never come back. He was very poor. His father had a small farm a few kilometres from town, and Daniel wore the boarding students' gray uniform overalls, because his family lived too far for him to go home every night. He had three or four older brothers we'd never met.

He didn't have friends. He didn't know anyone and no one knew him. Perhaps he preferred it that way, so as not to be tied down. He had a strange face, pointed and sharp like the blade of a knife, and those beautiful, indifferent black eyes.

He gave us no warning, but I'm sure that he had prepared everything by then. He had mapped it all out in his head, had memorized the streets and the routes, the names of the cities he had to pass through. Perhaps he had been dreaming of a lot of things, day after day, and night after night, lying in his dormitory bed, while the rest of us joked around or sneaked cigarettes. He had dreamed of rivers travelling gently toward their estuaries, of the cries of seagulls, of the wind, and of the storms that blow past the masts of sailboats and the beacons of the buoys.

He left in the early days of winter, in the middle of September. When the other boarding students woke up in the big gray dormitory, he had disappeared. We noticed right away, as soon as we opened our eyes, because his bed was still made. The covers had been carefully tucked in, and everything was in order. We said only, "Hey! Daniel is gone!," without being really surprised, because after all we must have suspected that this might happen. None of us said anything else, because no one wanted him to be found and brought back.

Even the most gossipy of the students in our year said nothing. And, in any case, what could they have said? We didn't know anything. For a long time, we whispered, in the courtyard or in French class, but only in short phrases that would make no sense to anyone but us:

"Do you think he's there now?"

"Do you think? Not yet, it's far, you know . . ."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yeah, maybe . . ."

The most daring said, "Perhaps he's in America already."

And the pessimists: "Bah, perhaps he'll be back today."

But, if we were silent, among the adults, by contrast, the incident made noise. The teachers and the administrators were regularly summoned to the headmaster's office, and even to the police station. From time to time, inspectors came and questioned the students, one by one, in an attempt to get us to spill the beans.

Naturally, we told them everything except what we knew: the sea. We spoke of the mountains, of cities, of girls, of treasure, even of vagabond kidnappers and the Foreign Legion. We said these things to cover Daniel's tracks, and the teachers and the administrators became more and more irritated, and that made them mean.

The noise lasted for several weeks, several months. There were two or three missing-persons notices in the newspapers, with Daniel's details and a photograph that didn't really look like him. Then suddenly everything was calm again, because, truth be told, we were all getting a little tired of the affair. Perhaps we had finally understood that he wasn't ever coming back.

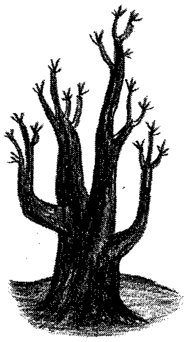
Daniel's parents resigned themselves to this because they were poor and there was nothing else they could do. The police closed the case—they told us so themselves, adding something that the teachers and the administrators kept repeating, as though it were normal, and which seemed to us, the other students, quite extraordinary. They said that every year tens of thousands of people disappeared without a trace and were never found. The teachers and the administrators repeated this sentence, shrugging their shoulders, as if it were the most banal thing in the world, but we, when we heard it—it made us dream. It began, deep within us, a secret and entrancing dream that hasn't ended yet.

Surely it was night when Daniel arrived, on board a freight train that had been travelling day and night for a long time. Freight trains run mostly at night, because they are very long and they move slowly from one junction to the next. Daniel was lying on the hard floor of a freight car, wrapped in an old piece of sackcloth. He watched through the shutters of the door, as the train slowed and came to a creaking stop near the docks. He opened the door. He jumped to the tracks, and ran along the embankment until he found a way over it. He had no baggage, just a navy-blue beach bag that

*Le Clézio, the winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Literature, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he lives part time.*

he always carried with him, and in which he had placed his old red book.

Now he was free, and he was cold. His legs hurt after all those hours on the train. It was night, it was raining. He walked as fast as he could to get away from the city. He didn't know where he was going. He walked straight ahead, between the walls of the warehouses, and along a road that glistened in the yellow light of the street lamps. There was no one around, no names written on the walls. But the sea wasn't far. He guessed that it was to his right, hidden behind the tall concrete buildings, somewhere in the night.



After a while, Daniel became tired of walking. He was in the country now, the lights of the city far behind him. The night was black, and the earth and the sea invisible. He looked for a place where he could take shelter from the rain and the wind, and he discovered a wooden shed beside the road, where he lay down until morning. He hadn't slept for several days, had barely eaten, because he had had to keep watch the whole time, through the door of the train car. He knew that he had to avoid the police. So he hid out of sight in a far corner of the shed. He nibbled at some bread and fell asleep.

When he woke up, the sun was already in the sky. He left the shed and took several steps, blinking in the light. A path led to the dunes, and he followed it. His heart began to beat harder, because he knew that the sea was just on the other side of the dunes, barely two hundred metres away. He ran along the path, climbed the sandy slope, the wind blowing harder now, carrying the unfamiliar noise and smell. Then he was at the top of the dune, and he could see it.

It was everywhere, immense, rising before him like the side of a mountain, shining blue, deep, so close, its tall waves advancing toward him.

The sea! The sea! Daniel thought, but he didn't dare say it aloud. He stood there, unable to move, his fingers slightly spread, not quite understanding that he had slept right next to it. He heard the slow noise of the waves moving against the beach. There was no wind now, and the sun shone on the sea, lighting a fire on the crest of each wave. The sand was the color of ash, smooth, crisscrossed with streams and pools of water reflecting the sky.

To himself, Daniel repeated the lovely word over and over. *The sea, the sea, the sea . . .* His head was full of noise and vertigo. He wanted to speak, to shout, even, but his throat would not allow his voice to pass. Then he had to move—shouting, tossing his blue bag far across the sand, jogging with his arms and legs as if he were crossing a highway. He leaped over the bands of dead seaweed; he stumbled in the dry sand at the top of the beach. He took off his shoes and socks and, barefoot, ran still faster, not even feeling the thorns of the thistles.

The sea was far, at the other end of the field of sand. It shone in the light, its color and appearance changing: a blue expanse, then gray, green, almost black against the ochre sandbanks, the white hems of the waves. Daniel didn't realize how far it was. He continued to run, his arms tight against his body, his heart pounding in his chest. Now he could feel the sand as hard as asphalt, wet and cold beneath his feet. As he drew closer, the sound of the waves grew louder, drowning out everything, like a steam whistle. First it was soft and slow, then violent and eerie, like a train on a railway bridge, then receding, like river water. But Daniel was not afraid. He continued to run as fast as he could in the cold air, without looking back. When he was only a few metres from the edge of the foam, he inhaled the smell of the depths and stopped. He had a cramp in his groin, and the strong scent of salt water prevented him from catching his breath.

He sat down on the wet sand and looked at the sea rising above him almost to the center of the sky. He had thought of this moment so many times, had so often imagined the day when he would finally see it, not in a photograph or in a movie but in reality, the sea itself, enormous, exposed, swollen, with its great line of waves throwing themselves forward and breaking, its clouds of foam, its drizzle of spray like dust motes in the sunlight, and, in the distance, the horizon curving like a wall across the sky! He had longed for this moment with such intensity that he was suddenly weak, as if he were about to die, or at least fall asleep.

It was really the sea, his sea, for him alone, and he knew that he could never leave it. He lay for a long time on the hard sand. He waited so long, stretched out on his side, that the sea began to climb the slope and reached his bare feet.

It was the tide. Daniel jumped to his feet, all his muscles tensed for flight. In the distance, the waves were thundering against a dark reef. But the water was still weak, breaking apart into bubbles at the foot of the beach, moving forward at a crawl. The light froth flowed around Daniel's legs, dug holes beneath his heels. The cold water bit at his toes and his ankles, and left them numb.

Along with the tide came the wind. It blew from the horizon. There were clouds in the sky. But they were unfamiliar clouds, like the foam of the sea, and salt was flying on the wind like grains of sand. Daniel no longer thought of fleeing. He began to walk along the beach, at the edge of the water. With each wave, he felt the sand flow back and forth between his toes. The horizon, in the distance, rose and fell like a breath, launching its attacks toward the earth.

Daniel was thirsty. In the hollow of his hand, he scooped up some water and foam and drank. The salt burned his mouth and his tongue, but he continued to drink, because he loved the taste of the sea. For so long he had dreamed of this water, free, unfettered, so much water that one could drink for a lifetime! The last tide had left on the shore some slabs of driftwood and roots that looked like giant bones. Now the water slowly picked them up again, moving them a little higher up the sand, along with some great black strands of seaweed.

Daniel walked along the edge of the water, gazing greedily at everything, as if he wanted to know, in an instant, all that the sea could show him. He held in his hands the sticky seaweed and fragments of shells; he dug in the silt where worms had tunnelled. He examined everything, walking or on all fours on the wet sand. The sun was hard and strong in the sky, and the sea rumbled ceaselessly.

From time to time, Daniel stopped to face the horizon and watch the tall waves searching for a way over the reef. He inhaled with all his strength, and it was as if the sea and the horizon were filling his lungs, his stomach, his head, and he had become a kind of giant. He looked at the dark water in the distance, where there was no land and no foam, only the open sky, and it was to that part of the sea that he spoke, in a low voice, as if it could hear. He said, "Come! Come this way! Come!

"You are beautiful. You will come, you will cover the earth, the cities. You will climb as high as the mountains!

"Come, with your waves. Climb! Climb! Over here! Over here!"

Then he retreated, walking backward step by step, to the top of the beach.

In this way, he learned the course of the water as it climbed, swelling, stretching its fingers into the little valleys of sand. Gray crabs ran in front of him, their pincers raised, as light as insects. White water filled mysterious holes, flooding secret tunnels. It climbed a little higher with each wave, spreading across the sand. Daniel danced before it, like the gray crabs. He ran through it, raising his arms as the water nipped at his heels. Then he returned, digging trenches in the sand so that the water would climb faster, and humming his song to make it rise: "Come on, climb, climb, waves! Climb higher, come higher! Come on!"

He was up to his belt in the water now, but he didn't feel cold or afraid. His sodden clothes stuck to his skin; his hair fell into his eyes like seaweed. The sea bubbled up around him, then retreated with such force that he had to grip the sand with his toes so as not to fall, then it threw itself upward again, pushing him toward the top of the beach.

Strands of dead seaweed whipped at his legs, wrapped themselves around his ankles. Daniel pulled them off like snakes, threw them into the water, yelling, "Arrh! Arrh!"

He didn't look at the sun or the sky. He didn't even see the distant strip of land, or the silhouettes of the trees. There was no one there, no one but the sea, and Daniel was free.

Suddenly the sea began to climb faster. It was spilling over the reef now and the waves were coming from the open sea, with nothing to hold them back. They were tall and wide, coming at a slight angle to the beach, their crests steaming, their blue centers falling away beneath them, lined with foam. They came so fast that Daniel did not have time to get away. He turned his back to run, and a wave reached his shoulders, swept over his head. Instinctively, he dug his nails into the sand and held his breath. The water thundered down on him, whirling, filling his eyes, his ears, his mouth, his nostrils.

Daniel crawled toward dry sand, struggling. He was so dizzy that he lay for a moment on his stomach, at the edge of the foam, unable to move. But more waves were grinding forward. They raised their crests and curled over, forming hollows like caves. Daniel ran for the top of the beach now, and he sat in the sand of the dunes, on the other side of the seaweed barrier. For the rest of the day, he didn't go any closer to the sea. But his body was still trembling, and all over his skin, even inside him, was the burning taste of salt, in the depths of his eyes the dazzling mark of the waves.

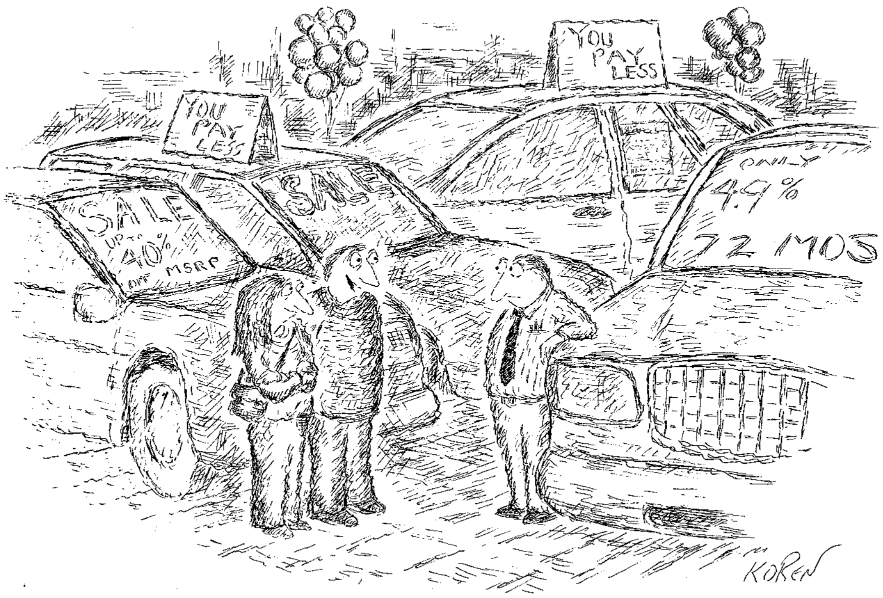
At the other end of the bay was a dark promontory riddled with caves. That was where Daniel lived, for the first days after he arrived at the sea. His cave was a nook amid the black boulders, lined with pebbles and gray sand. That was where he lived for those days, without ever, so to speak, taking his eyes off the sea.

In the early morning, when the sunlight was pale and gray, and the horizon barely visible, like a wire between the blended colors of sea and sky, Daniel would get up and leave his cave. He climbed to the top of the black boulders to drink the rainwater that collected there in pools. Huge seabirds came there, too, flying around him with long grating cries, and Daniel greeted them with whistles. When the sea was low, its mysterious depths were uncovered: ponds of dark water, streams cascading between the stones, slippery paths, and hills of living seaweed. At these times, Daniel would leave the promontory and climb down through the rocks into the center of the field uncovered by the sea. It was as if he were arriving at the center of the sea itself, a strange country, which existed for only a few hours a day.

He had to hurry. The black ribbon of the reef was close and he could hear the low rumbling of the waves, and the murmur of the deep currents. Here the sun didn't shine for long. The sea would soon return and cover everything with shadow, and the light would reflect off the water without warming anything. The sea might reveal its secrets, but you had to learn them quickly, before they were hidden again. Daniel ran across the rocks of the seafloor, amid the forests of seaweed. A powerful smell rose from the ponds and the dark valleys, a smell unfamiliar and intoxicating to humans.

In the great pools of water, right beside the sea, Daniel looked for fish, shrimp, shellfish. He thrust his arms between the tufts of seaweed and waited for the crustaceans to come and tickle his fingers, then he caught them. In the pools, the sea anemones, purple, gray, blood-red, opened and closed their petals.

On the flat rocks lived blue and white limpets, orange sea snails, mitre snails, tellin clams, and ark clams. Sometimes, at the bottom of the pools, the light caught the wide back of a buoy or the opal mother-of-pearl of a mollusk. Or, sud-



*"What do you have in size extra-small?"*

denly, between the strands of seaweed, the empty shell of an old abalone, iridescent as a cloud, or the perfect form of a scallop. Daniel watched them there, for a long time, through the pane of water, and it was as if he were living in the pool as well, at the bottom of a crevice in the rock, dazzled by the sun and waiting for the night of the sea.

For food, he hunted limpets. He had to creep up on them silently so that they wouldn't weld themselves to the rocks. Then he could unstick them with a kick, striking with the tip of his big toe. But often the limpets heard his footsteps, or the hiss of his breath, and they glued themselves to the flat rocks with a series of clicks. When Daniel had collected enough shrimps and shellfish, he'd deposit his catch in a little pool in the hollow of a rock, so that he could cook it later, in a tin can over a seaweed fire. Then he went farther out, all the way to the end of the field at the bottom of the sea, to where the waves were breaking. Because that was where his octopus friend lived.

Daniel had known the octopus since he arrived at the sea, had met it even before he knew the seabirds and the anemones. It had come right up to the edge of the breakers, when the sea and the horizon were still, and the great dark currents seemed to hold back before leaping forward. It was the most secret place in the world, there where the light shines for just minutes a day. Daniel walked very softly, clinging to the edge of the slippery rocks, as if he were descending to the center of the earth. He saw the pool of water, where long strands of seaweed swayed slowly, and he held himself still, his face almost touching the surface. Then he noticed the tentacles of the octopus floating by the edge of the pool. They were rising out of a hole near the bottom, like plumes of smoke, sliding gently among the plants. Daniel held his breath, watched the tentacles barely moving amid the strings of seaweed.

Then the octopus came out. Its long cylindrical body moved cautiously, its tentacles undulating before it. In the brief broken light of the sun, the octopus's yellow eyes shone like metal beneath their prominent lids. It let its long tentacles with their mauve disks float for a moment, as if it were looking for something. Then it saw Daniel's shadow leaning over the pool and it jumped backward, clenching its tentacles and releasing a strange gray-blue cloud.

Now, as he did every day, Daniel stood at the edge of the pool, very close to the waves. He leaned over the transparent water, and softly called to the octopus. He sat on the rock, letting his bare legs trail in the water beside the crevice where the octopus lived, and he waited without moving. After a moment, he felt the tentacles lightly touching his skin, wrapping themselves around his ankles. The octopus caressed him cautiously, sometimes between the toes or on the soles of his feet, and Daniel started to laugh.

"Hello, Wyatt," Daniel said. The octopus was called Wyatt, though of course it didn't know its name. Daniel spoke to it in a low voice, so as not to scare it. He asked it questions about what happened at the bottom of the sea, what one could see from beneath the waves. Wyatt didn't answer, but continued to caress Daniel's feet and ankles, very gently, as if with strands of hair.

Daniel loved it. He could never see the octopus for long, because the sea rose quickly. When his fishing had gone well, Daniel brought a crab, or some shrimp, and released them into the pool. The gray tentacles shot out like whips, seized the prey, and carried it back to the rock. Daniel never saw the octopus eat. It was almost always hidden in its dark crevice, immobile, with its long tentacles floating in front of it. Perhaps it was like Daniel—perhaps it had travelled a long time to find its home at the bottom of the pool, from which it could see the clear sky through transparent water.

When the sea was at its lowest point, it was as if the whole world were lit up. Daniel walked over the rocks, on a carpet of seaweed, as the sun reflected off the water and the stones, lighting fires full of violence. There was no wind then, not even a breath. Above the field at the bottom of the sea, the blue sky was huge, and it shone with an exceptional light. Daniel felt the warmth on his head and shoulders. He closed his eyes so as not to be blinded by the terrible shimmering. There was nothing else, of course, nothing: the sky, the sun, the salt, which began to dance on the rocks.

One day when the sea had receded so far that you could see only a thin blue line toward the horizon, Daniel set off over the rocks at the bottom of the sea. He felt, suddenly, the intoxication of those who are about to enter virgin territory and know that they may never make it home. There was nothing familiar that day: everything was unknown, new. Daniel turned around and saw solid land behind him, like a lake of mud. He felt the solitude, the silence of the bare rocks eroded by water, the uneasiness seeping out of all the fissures and secret holes, and he began to walk faster, then run. His heart beat harder in his chest, as it had the first day he arrived at the sea. He ran without stopping to catch his breath, leaped over the pools and the seaweed valleys, followed the rocky ridges, spreading his arms to maintain his balance.

Here and there were large slimy slabs of rock, covered with microscopic algae, or sharp rocks, like blades, strange stones that looked like sharkskin. Everywhere, the pools of water sparkled, shivered. The encrusted shells on the rocks crackled in the sunlight, the rolls of seaweed made a strange steaming noise.

Daniel ran through the field at the bottom of the sea, without knowing where he was going. He didn't stop to check the position of the waves. The sea had disappeared now; it had retreated as far as the horizon, as if it had flowed into a hole that led to the center of the earth.

Daniel was not afraid, but it was as if he were no longer entirely himself. He didn't call the sea; he didn't even speak to it anymore. The sunlight reflected off the water of the pools as if in a mirror; it broke against the pointed edges of the rocks; it leaped from place to place, multiplying its rays. The light was everywhere at once, so close that he could feel on his face the movement of its beams, or so far that it was like the cold sparkle of the planets. It was because of the light that Daniel was running, zigzagging across the field of rocks. The light had rendered him both free and mad, and he leaped like the light, without seeing. The light was not soft and peaceful, like the light of beaches and dunes. It was a crazy whirlpool that swirled endlessly, bouncing between the two mirrors of sky and rocks.

And then there was the salt. For days, it had been accumulating every-

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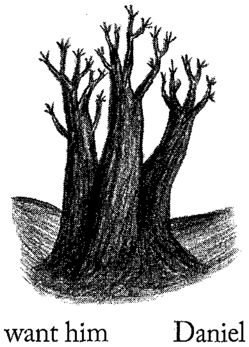
where, on the black stones, on the pebbles, in mollusk shells, and even on the pale little leaves of the plants at the foot of the cliff. Salt had penetrated Daniel's skin, had formed deposits on his lips, in his eyebrows and his eyelashes, in his hair and his clothes, and now it formed a hard carapace that burned. Salt had even found its way inside his body, into his throat, his stomach, into his very bones, where it gnawed and crunched like glass dust. It lit painful sparks on his retinas. The sunlight had inflamed the salt, and now each prism glittered around Daniel and in his body. And then there was a kind of drunkenness, an electricity that vibrated, because the salt and the light did not want him to stand still; they wanted him to run, to dance, to jump from one rock to another—they wanted him to flee across the bottom of the sea.



Daniel had never seen so much whiteness. Even the water in the pools, even the sky was white. They burned his retinas. Daniel closed his eyes entirely and he stopped, because his legs were shaking and could carry him no further. He sat on a flat rock, in front of a lake of seawater. He listened to the sound of the light bouncing off the rocks, the dry clicks and crackles, the hisses and, right next to his ears, a sharp murmur, like the bees' song. He was thirsty, but it was as if no water could ever satisfy him. The light continued to burn his face, his hands, his shoulders. It bit at him with thousands of pricks and tingles. Salty tears began to flow from his closed eyes, slowly tracing the hot grooves of his cheeks. Struggling to half open his eyelids, he looked at the field of white rocks, the great desert where the pools of cruel water were shining. The sea animals and the shellfish had disappeared. They were hiding in the cracks, beneath the curtains of seaweed.

Daniel leaned forward on the flat rock and pulled his shirt over his head, so as not to see the light and the salt. He stayed there for a long time, immobile, his head between his knees, while the burning dance continued back and forth across the bottom of the sea.

Then came the wind, mild at first, barely moving through the thick air. Then growing, a cold wind that blew from the horizon. The pools of seawater rippled and changed color. Clouds appeared in the sky; the light became coherent again. Daniel heard the rumbling of the sea as it approached, the great waves beating their bellies against the rocks. Drops of water dampened his clothes, and he shook off his torpor.

The sea was there, already. It was coming fast, rushing to surround the first rocks, turning them into islands. It drowned the crevices, gliding forward like a river in flood. Each time it swallowed up another piece of rock there was a muffled sound that shook the base of the earth, and a roar in the air.

Daniel jumped up. He began to run toward the shore without stopping. Now he was no longer sleepy. He no longer feared the light and the salt. He felt a sort of anger growing deep inside his body, a strength that he didn't understand, as if he could have crushed the rocks and kicked open the crevices with one blow from his heel. He ran ahead of the sea, following the path of the wind, and he heard behind him the roaring of the waves. From time to time, he called out himself, imitating them, "Rrrrr! Rrrrr!," as if it were he who ruled the sea.

He had to run fast! The sea wanted to take everything, the rocks, the seaweed, and also the boy who was running before it. Sometimes it reached out an arm, to the left or to the right of him, a long gray arm, speckled with foam, that cut off his path. He jumped to the side and looked for another path along the surface of the rocks, as the water retreated, sucking out the holes and crevices.

Daniel swam across several lakes whose water was already cloudy. He was no longer tired. On the contrary, he felt a kind of joy, as if the sea, the wind, and the sun had dissolved the salt and freed him.

The sea was beautiful! The white spray rose in the light, high and straight, then came down in clouds of vapor that slid through the wind. New water filled the hollows of the rocks, washed away the white crust, tore off the tufts of seaweed. Far away, beside the cliffs, the white expanse of the beach shone. Daniel thought of Sinbad's shipwreck, when he was carried by the waves to the island of King Mihrage, and it was just like that now. He ran fast across the rocks, his bare feet choosing the best route without his even having time to think about it. It was as if he had lived here always, in this field at the bottom of the sea, amid shipwrecks and storms.

He was moving at the same speed as the sea, without stopping, without catching his breath, listening to the noise of the waves. They came from the other end of the world, tall, leaning forward. Tipped with foam, they slipped across the smooth rocks and smashed into crevices.

The sun shone with its steady light, close to the horizon. It was the sun that offered the waves its strength, its light pushing them into the earth. It was like a dance that would never end, the dance of salt when the sea was low, the dance of waves and wind when the flow returned to the shore.

When the sea reached the edge of seaweed, Daniel entered his cave. He sat on the pebbles to watch the sea and the sky. But the waves were over the first band of seaweed now, and he had to retreat to the back of the cave. The sea beat on, sent its white expanse quivering across the pebbles like water about to boil. The waves continued to climb, one after the other, until they reached the last strip of seaweed and twigs—the driest seaweed, the branches of trees whitened by salt, all that had been piled up at the entrance of the cave for months. The water butted against the debris, separating pieces out and carrying them away in the undertow. Now Daniel had his back against the back wall of the cave. He could retreat no further. So he stared at the sea to stop it. With all his strength, he stared at it, unspeaking, and he sent the waves backward, making countercurrents that broke the sea's momentum.

Several times, the waves jumped over the ramparts of seaweed and debris, splashing the back of the cave and swirling around Daniel's legs. Then suddenly the sea stopped climbing. The terrible noise calmed, the waves became softer, slower, as if weighed down by their own foam. Daniel understood that it was over.

He lay down on the pebbles at the entrance to the cave, his head toward the sea. He trembled with cold and fatigue,

"CELUI QUI N'AVAIT JAMAIS VU LA MER" FROM "MONDO ET AUTRES HISTOIRES" © ÉDITIONS GALLIMARD, PARIS, 1978

but he had never known such happiness. He slept this way, in the calm, and the light of the sun went down slowly, like a dying flame.

And after this what became of him? What did he do, all those days, all those months, in his cave by the sea? Perhaps he really did go to America, or to China, on a cargo ship that travelled slowly from port to port, from island to island. Dreams that begin like this never have to end. For us here, far from the sea, everything was both impossible and easy. All we knew was that something strange had happened.

It was strange because there was an illogical aspect to it that contradicted what the serious people were telling us. The teachers, the administrators, the police—they had all been so desperate to find some trace of Daniel Sinbad, they had asked so many questions, and then one day, after a certain period of time had passed, they began to act as though Daniel had never existed. They never spoke of him again. They sent all his personal effects, even his old assignments, to his parents, and there was nothing left of him at the school but his memory. And even his memory they wanted little to do with. They began to talk about other things—about their wives and their houses, their cars and the local elections—as before, as if nothing had happened.

Perhaps they weren't pretending. Perhaps they really had forgotten Daniel, after having thought of him too much for months. Perhaps if he had come back and presented himself at the door of the school, people wouldn't even have recognized him, would have asked, "Who are you? What do you want?"

But we—we hadn't forgotten him. In the classrooms, in the dormitory, in the courtyard, no one had forgotten him, not even those who had never known him. We talked about the usual school things—our math problems, our Latin translations—but always we were thinking of him, as if he really were a kind of Sinbad, still making his way around the world. From time to time, we'd fall silent and someone would ask a question, always the same one: "Do you think he's there?"

No one knew exactly what we meant by "there," but it was as if we could see the place, the immense sea, the sky, the clouds, the wild reef, and the waves, the great white birds soaring in the wind.

When the breeze shook the branches of the chestnut trees, we looked at the sky and said, in a worried tone, like sailors, "It'll be stormy there."

And when the winter sun shone in the blue sky we noted, "He's lucky today."

But we never said much more than that. It was as if we had unwittingly made a pact with Daniel, a silent, secret agreement—or perhaps it was just the dream that began, quite simply, one morning, when we opened our eyes and saw in the dim light of the dormitory Daniel's bed, which he had made for the rest of his life, as if he would never sleep again. ♦

*(Translated, from the French, by Deborah Treisman.)*

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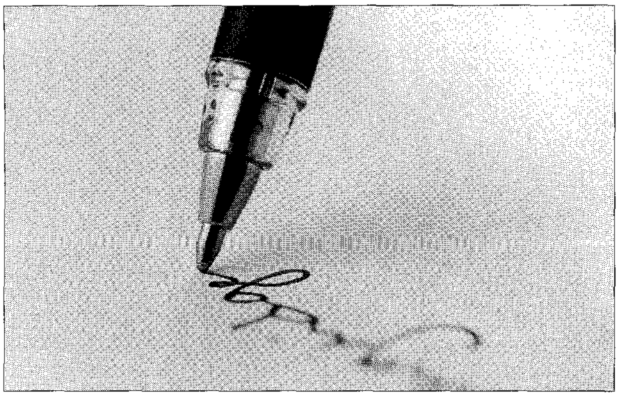

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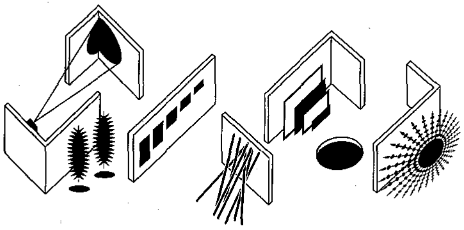

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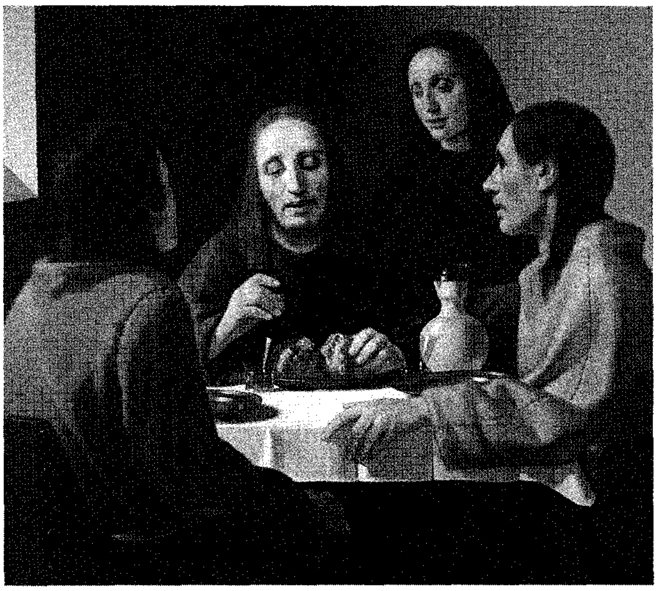
*The art forger who became a national hero.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

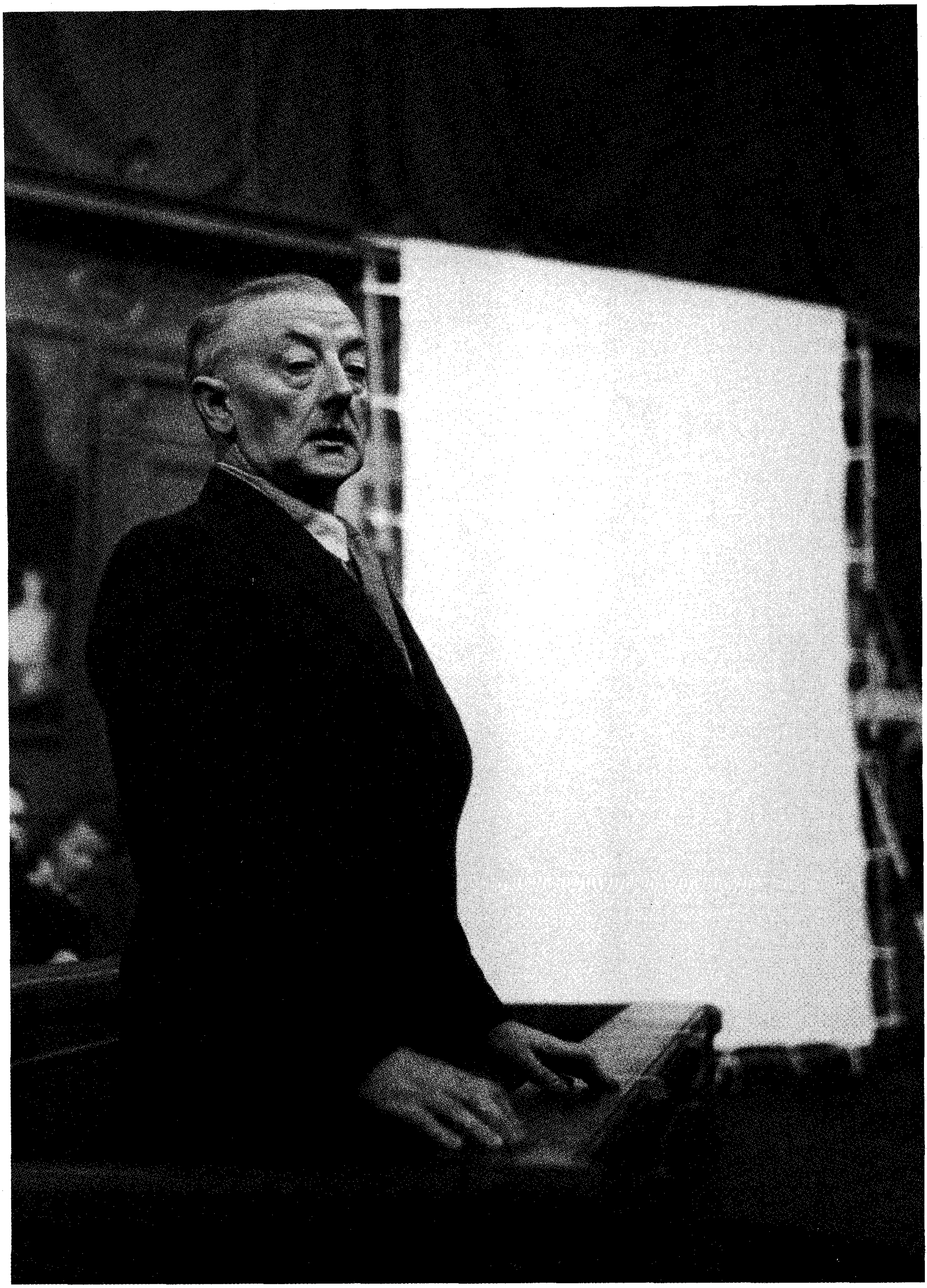
The case of Han van Meegeren, the boldest modern forger of Old Masters (as far as we know), is a grand yarn of twisty deceit, involving prestigious dupes and scads of money, with a sensational trial at the finish. It even has a serious side. Van Meegeren, since his death, in 1947, has become a compulsive reference for philosophical discussions of fact and fraud in art—a subject bound to disquiet art lovers. (Be honest. What you are given to believe about an art work is going to color your experience of it.) He became the most original of fakers when, starting in 1936, he put aside mere canny simulations, mostly of the work of Johannes Vermeer, to create wildly implausible pictures which were presented as discoveries of a missing phase in the artist's conveniently spotty, little-documented opus. (Only thirty-five undisputed Vermeers exist today. As an added boon to forgers, a few aren't very good.) Van Meegeren's tour de force was a feat more of intellect than of skill. He knew whom he had to fool first: an eighty-three-year-old monster of vanity named Abraham Bredius, who had an earned, though moldering, track record as an authenticator of newfound Vermeers. In 1937, in the august British art-history journal *The Burlington Magazine*, Bredius declared "The Supper at Emmaus," the first of van Meegeren's late counterfeits, to be "*the* masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft." Other Dutch experts concurred, under pressure to keep a national treasure from being sold overseas. (The remarkably dreary canvas still hangs, presented now as a historical curio, at the Boijmans Museum, in Rotterdam, which bought it in 1937.) It took van Meegeren himself to reveal the truth, in 1945, when not to do so might have put his neck in a hangman's noose.



Two new books re-spin the van Meegeren saga, one breezily, with entertaining digressions on secondary figures and the arcana of forgery, and the other in profoundly researched, focussed, absorbing depth. "The Forger's Spell: A True Story of Vermeer, Nazis, and the Greatest Art Hoax of the Twentieth Century" (Harper; $26.95), by the science journalist Edward Dolnick, aggrandizes the story's abundant hooks, such as the happenstance that van Meegeren's victims included the art maven Hermann Göring, who, in 1943, swapped a hundred and thirty-seven paintings from his largely ill-gotten collection for a van Meegeren Vermeer. "The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren" (Harcourt; $26), by the writer and artist Jonathan Lopez, brings hard light to van Meegeren's machinations and (very bad) character. Lopez debunks the myths, savored by Dolnick, which cast the forger as a romantic avenger, and which sweeten the tale in other ways. It seems that Göring, while awaiting trial in Nuremberg, may not have learned that his cherished Vermeer was a phony, as nice as it is to think that he did. This small point is notable because, in time, the fact that van Meegeren had scammed Göring helped him not only to evade charges of collaboration but to become a folk hero. Lopez demonstrates how evidence of the painter's coziness with the Occupation regime got buried by the single question of whether he had sold Göring a patrimonial cynosure (potentially a capital offense) or a worthless fake. Early in 1947, a newspaper poll found van Meegeren to be the second most popular man in the Netherlands, after the newly elected Prime Minister.

Van Meegeren was born in 1889, in the provincial city of Deventer, the third of five children in a middle-class Catholic family. In 1907, his father, a schoolmaster, sent him to Vermeer's city, Delft, to study architecture. The feckless lad preferred to paint and draw. In 1911, he got his girlfriend, a Protestant named Anna de Voogt, pregnant. They married and soon had a second child. He worked as an assistant drawing instructor (the only steady job he ever held) until 1917, when he moved his household to "the city of beautiful nonsense," as a contemporaneous guidebook characterized The Hague—the home of the royal family and an illustrious strutting ground for the

TOP: PIERRE DI SCIULLO; LEFT: MUSEUM BOIJMANS VAN BEUNINGEN, ROTTERDAM; RIGHT: YALE JOEL/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY



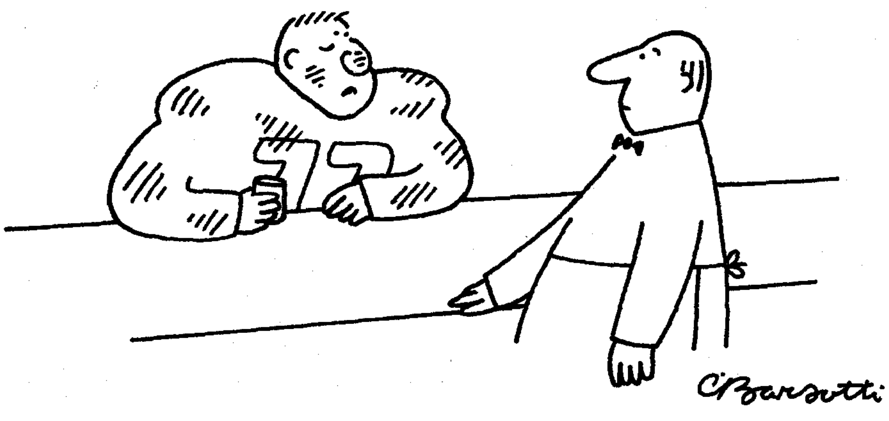
*Han van Meegeren on trial, in 1947. His "Supper at Emmaus," opposite, was declared to be "the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer."*

idle rich. There he launched himself as an artist. With "his small, birdlike frame constantly aflutter and his irreverent sense of humor," in Lopez's description, van Meegeren beguiled the town. (A photograph of him from 1918, in Lopez's book, made me laugh out loud; he comes across as the archetypal simpering fop, fit to start a scene by P. G. Wodehouse.) Lopez—who, unlike Dolnick, speaks Dutch and is steeped in the history of the period—records that van Meegeren became the favorite artist of the Liberal State Party of the Netherlands, a fading force of the patrician élite. His work was sprightly, in a nostalgically conservative vein. His pretty, filmy drawing of a doe, identified as a pet of the young Princess Julianna, became a popular icon throughout the Netherlands. Reproductions testify that he had a subtle sense of color and a firm gift for telling portraiture. Come to think of it, what are artistic forgeries but portraits of imaginary art works?

Van Meegeren's first legitimate exhibition in The Hague, in 1917, of work in several genres, reaped positive reviews. His second, five years later, of Christian religious paintings, sold well but repelled critics with its treacly piety—van Meegeren, it turned out, was a student of Scripture. (In the show, there was an early-warning "Supper at Emmaus"—representing Jesus, who has appeared as a stranger to his disciples after his death, being recognized at the moment when he breaks bread for them.) Informed opinion consigned van Meegeren to the always populous ranks of the formerly promising. He evoked the setback poignantly in his public confession, in 1945: "Driven into a state of anxiety and depression due to the all-too-meager appreciation of my work, I decided, one fateful day, to revenge myself on the art critics and experts by doing something the likes of which the world had never seen before." That's rubbish, if only because the "something" to which van Meegeren referred—his invention of a new Vermeer style—was just the latest chapter in a then still unknown, long-running criminal enterprise. Lopez affirms that van Meegeren was dirty before his artistic reputation collapsed. He speculates—reasonably, to my mind—that faking ruined the artist's creativity. "Slowly but surely, the imitative logic of forgery condemned Van Meegeren to a state of arrested development," Lopez writes. The state of being oneself dies when set aside.

Lopez dates van Meegeren's initiation into The Hague's underworld of art swindlers to 1920, at the latest. He was mentored by a dealer and painter, Theo van Wijngaarden, who had apprenticed in chicanery with a titan: Leo Nardus. Nardus stuck American millionaires with innumerable old copies, fresh fakes, and fanciful misattributions of famous artists until 1908, when a panel of invited experts, including Bernard Berenson and Roger Fry, convened at the home of the Philadelphia streetcar magnate P. A. B. Widener and concluded that his collection was worth about five per cent of what Nardus had charged him for it. (Found out but unexposed—to spare Widener and other duped moguls public embarrassment—Nardus was left free to indulge his passions for chess and swordsmanship; he won a bronze medal in fencing for the Dutch team at the 1912 Olympics.) The hardly less resourceful van Wijngaarden, on his own, perfected a paint medium, gelatin glue, to finesse a standard test for the age of oil paint: rubbing with alcohol, which dissolves oils that have had less than decades to dry. (The glue weathers alcohol but, as was later discovered—too late for a generation of marks—softens on contact with another chemical compound: water.) Van Wijngaarden maintained a network of well-placed accomplices, extending to London and Berlin, who could pilot fakes into the mainstream of respectable commerce. He lacked only top-drawer product. He himself painted well, but not well enough. He wanted an adept protégé, and he found him in van Meegeren, who was ready.

Soon after arriving in The Hague, van Meegeren had cast off Anna and the children and taken up with the raffish Johanna de Boer, the actress wife of a friend. She became his complaisant partner for life and, in 1928, his second wife, apparently indulgent of his extravagant and libertine ways, as well as his alcoholism, which became full-blown in the early nineteen-thirties. During the war, van Meegeren even maintained a separate house, in Amsterdam, for partying, where, it was reported, prostitutes were encouraged to grab jewels from an opened strongbox on their way out. Johanna is frustratingly shadowy in both books. What she knew of her husband's crimes needn't be plumbed. Starting in the nineteen-twenties, his spasmodic income, which added up to millions of pre-inflation dollars, would have spoken for itself. After 1932, the couple inhabited houses on the French Riviera, where van Meegeren could more easily evade questions about his mysterious wealth. But Johanna's point of view would be fascinating grist—for a novel, if not enough is discoverable to flesh out a biography. The same can be said of several supporting players in the comedy. Dolnick gratifies a reader's side-long interest with piquant accounts of, among others, the gulled Bredius, a gay, once brilliant aesthete, living in splendor in Monaco, with an insatiable ache for prestige, and Joseph Piller, a young Jewish lieutenant and hero of the Dutch Resistance, who arrested van Meegeren—knocking at the door of the artist's grand house on May 29, 1945—and then, in a fever of vicarious celebrity, became his champion, a seduction trenchantly conveyed by Lopez. (The "fat, swaggering" figure of the infinitely grotesque Göring, how-



*"The second half? Yeah, as far as I know they're playing the second half."*

ever, distractingly consumes far more pages in Dolnick's narrative than his part warrants.)

Van Meegeren never admitted having produced any of the known gelatin-glue Vermeers, which included "The Lacemaker" and "The Smiling Girl," but he almost certainly did paint them. Van Wijngaarden steered the pictures to the attention of a revered German connoisseur, Wilhelm von Bode, who was taken in by them—predictably, as they seem to have been created with him in mind. ("The Smiling Girl" echoed a detail of a Vermeer—"The Girl with a Glass of Wine"—that Bode had adored since his early youth.) The always sticky matter of provenance was glossed over with tales of impecunious émigrés from the Russian Revolution—at a time when toppled aristocrats manned hotel doors throughout Europe—and amid expectations that lost works by Vermeer were bound to turn up, several having done so since his rediscovery by a French connoisseur in the eighteen-sixties. The two paintings were sold to the Pittsburgh banker Andrew Mellon by the magus of Old Master dealers, Joseph Duveen, and adorned the National Gallery in Washington, at one point nervously reassigned to a "Follower of Vermeer," in the nineteen-seventies. "The Lacemaker," especially, looks silly now, depicting a pert young woman who could be a sidekick of Louise Brooks. But superior forgeries typically secrete subliminally up-to-the-minute associations, which pass, at first blush, as signs of "timeless" genius. The art historian Max Friedländer, who said, "Forgeries must be served hot," promulgated a forty-year rule—four decades or so being how long it takes for the modern nuances of a forgery to date themselves as clichés of the period in which they were painted. Duveen was misled, although he wasn't by van Meegeren's "Emmaus." In 1937, he sent his right-hand man, Edward Fowles, to inspect the painting in Paris. Fowles cabled, "PICTURE A ROTTEN FAKE." (Duveen kept the verdict to himself; saving other dealers from disgrace didn't figure in his business plan.) Both books vivify the wild-and-woolly milieu of Jazz Age dealing in old art. Barely professionalized, and with museum science still primitive, the trade relied on the often snap judgments of glorified amateurs, of whom even the loftiest (even Berenson) were goof-prone—Duveen had earlier spurned "Girl with the Red Hat," the only true Vermeer to emerge in the twenties.

Dolnick is good on van Meegeren's studio practice, which kept pace with scientific progress. Mediocre old paintings, from the prolific Dutch Golden Age, were cheaply available, as grounds to paint on; but the overnight creation of a convincingly antique paint surface was a challenge. Van Meegeren's late fakes deploy Bakelite, which, as a liquid medium, hardens with heat and stands up to almost any solvent. He learned, with difficulty, to make an ancestor of modern plastics ape the fluency of oils. Many failed experiments led at length to a proper blend, with admixed floral oils, and the correct baking recipe. "Emmaus," a big picture, would have been larger, but the old painting, on its original stretchers, that van Meegeren bought for the job wouldn't fit in his makeshift oven. As a matter of course, he used only pigments that were available to Vermeer, and concocted effects of age: craquelure, wormholes, yellowed varnish, soilage, and, for good measure in "Emmaus," a poorly repaired rip. He turned negligent in subsequent works. Göring's canvas, "Christ and the Adulteress," employs cobalt blue, a nineteenth-century innovation in paints, and it is carelessly drawn, with anatomical solecisms in the figures. But van Meegeren no longer had to evoke Vermeer. It was enough that the hand that painted the works plainly be the same that had painted "Emmaus." In 1945, his captor, Joseph Piller, had him paint a valedictory Vermeer, putatively to settle doubts of his confession but really, Lopez establishes, as a publicity stunt. That showpiece, "Christ in the Temple," strikes me, in reproduction, as by far the most fetching of the lot, garnished with a droll anachronism: Jesus holds forth over an opened Bible. Time-travelled to recent years, van Meegeren would have made an upstanding postmodernist.

In the nineteen-thirties, painting Vermeers became less of a problem for van Meegeren than legitimatizing them. Having drifted out of touch with complicit intermediaries, he came into his own as a con man, tricking innocents into bringing his goods to market. The patsy for "Emmaus" was a Liberal State Party parliamentarian, Gerard A. Boon, who had led the successful fight for woman suffrage in the Netherlands and was a fierce critic of Nazi Germany. Van Meegeren convinced this good man that the painting belonged to a Dutch family living in Italy, who, persecuted by the Fascist authorities, desperately needed funds for an escape to America. The rest was intricate but, once Bredius was on board, smoothly managed. Boon's receptiveness to van Meegeren is a puzzle, given Lopez's insistence that the artist was an arch ultra-rightist. But his case seems solid. For three years, starting in 1928, in The Hague, van Meegeren published a scurrilous magazine, *De Kemphann* (*The Fighting Cock*), in which, Lopez writes, he "denounced modern painting as 'art-Bolshevism,' described its proponents as a 'slimy bunch of woman-haters and negro-lovers,' and invoked the image of 'a Jew with a handcart' as a symbol for the international art market." He execrated van Gogh in particular. In 1945, while van Meegeren was imprisoned, an awkward item turned up in Hitler's private library at the Reich Chancellery, in Berlin: a deluxe volume of poems by a Dutch Nazi poet, illustrated by van Meegeren and inscribed, in German, "To my beloved Führer in grateful tribute, from H. van Meegeren, Laren, North Holland, 1942." Van Meegeren acknowledged the signature but theorized that a German officer must have penned the dedication, even though the handwriting was clearly the same. At his trial on an open-and-shut charge of forgery, all such matters were ignored. Urges to go easy on van Meegeren seem to have afflicted ordinarily sensible people—Dolnick among them, in much of his book—as if by hypnosis.

Lopez advances a sophisticated and troubling answer to the question that is most likely to baffle us: How could anyone, for an instant, have taken "Emmaus" to be a work by Vermeer? I remember being stupefied, many years ago, when, ignorant of van Meegeren, I came upon the painting in the Boijmans. It seemed not only unlike Vermeer but unlike anything this side of a thrift shop. I missed stylistic cues that both Lopez and Dolnick describe, mainly the borrowed composition of a 1606 "Emmaus" by Caravaggio. This planted secret thrilled scholars who had been debating possible Italian influences on Vermeer, one writer having gone so far as to wonder if a lost work might be found to prove the connection.

Vermeer was known to have painted one Biblical scene—"Christ in the House of Mary and Martha" (1654-55)—why not another? He was, and still is, suspected of having been a closet Catholic, embracing a faith, his wife's, that was banned in Delft. Both the character and the obscure provenance of "Emmaus" made sense if it had been created for one of Delft's clandestine Catholic churches. But that does not explain the enthusiasm of credulous aesthetes for a dismal painting. Lopez deduces a blind spot in our art-historical knowledge and, indeed, in our larger comprehension of European culture between the World Wars. We may easily peg the party-girl mien in "The Lacemaker" and the longueur of another van Meegeren triumph, "The Girl with a Blue Hat," bought by the major collector Baron Heinrich Thyssen, which merits its sobriquet, "The Greta Garbo Vermeer." But the period accent of "Emmaus" escapes us.

It's *Volksgeist*, Lopez argues. "Folk spirit" has a long genealogy of relatively benign synonyms, such as "national character." Hegel promoted it as a force in history. But the idea generated new, dark energies in the prewar period. Styles of heavily expressive, soulful celebrations of common people were prevalent in Germany. Unlike the better-known socialist realism, with its crisp paeans to the proletariat, *Volkisch* art cultivated painterly effects to stir both Christian and pagan mystical associations, favoring peasant scenes and such themes as familial devotion and earth-mother fecundity. Besides tapping that vogue, van Meegeren pandered to an eagerness, among rightist critics, to winkle out Germanic roots of classical Dutch art. He seems to have modelled the head of Christ, in his "Emmaus," on a self-portrait by Dürer—a recondite proof of influence that he could count on experts to notice. Lopez argues that the determined suppression, after the war, of anything with a Nazi odor—and a chronic lack of appetite for the material ever since—leaves us blinking at hints of a style that was second nature in Europe seventy years ago. The contemporary resonance surely startled viewers at the time, but, rather than raise eyebrows, it enlarged the sense of Vermeer's greatness. It seemed more than conceivable that a genius of his calibre could foreshadow future sensibilities as, say, Leonardo da Vinci is routinely credited with having done. Lopez's exegesis of Nazi-tinged artistry is hard to absorb, without nausea, in the way that Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will" is hard to watch. But an empathetic grasp of that time's susceptibility to van Meegeren's bait brings the climactic scene of his trial, in Amsterdam, in October, 1947, to life.

Apparently, by 1947, the Dutch were not only tired of the war but tired of being tired of it, too. After a paroxysm of angry revenge on collaborators, they craved a carnival. Van Meegeren became a giddy nation's "Lord of Misrule," Lopez writes. Brushed aside were treasonous commissions for the Occupation and dealings with the vilest of local quislings—mainly the art commissioner Ed Gerdes, a zealous anti-Semite—and with Alois Miedl, a Bavarian banker who became Göring's man in the Dutch art world, energetically plundering Jewish collections. Van Meegeren's humiliation of so many stuffed shirts, Nazi and otherwise, was too pricelessly funny to be marred by stale grudges. The trial took place in a courtroom hung with "Emmaus" and other van Meegeren hoaxes. Superfluously, the artist having confessed, technical experts presented charts, graphs, and slides of a new test that proved the works' recent manufacture. Van Meegeren fulsomely congratulated the men on their ingenuity. The faking of Old Masters would henceforth be impossible, he said. Courtroom onlookers clapped and whistled. I imagine, extrapolating from Lopez, that their pleasure went beyond jolly Schadenfreude. Seeing the celebrated paintings exposed as fraudulent may have enabled a purge of formerly impressive symbols. The auratic Christ and the wonderstruck disciples turned farcical. The slim, silver-haired van Meegeren, dapper in a blue serge suit, seems to have read the mood (whatever it was) perfectly and to have milked it for advantage.

He had done the Vermeers only to prove himself, he testified, hewing to what Lopez calls "the master-forger-as-misunderstood-genius storyline," which the prosecution failed to deflate. At one point, the judge hazarded a skeptical note: "You do admit, though, that you sold these pictures for very high prices?" Van Meegeren's answer cracked up the room: "I could hardly have done otherwise. Had I sold them for low prices, it would have been obvious they were fake." He could get away with anything: "I didn't do it for the money, which brought me nothing but trouble and unhappiness." Just one witness, an art historian who had been active in the Resistance, hinted at shady aspects of van Meegeren's wartime conduct. The artist countered with a mocking, nonsensical cross-examination, to the audience's delight. The witness, Lopez writes, "smiled in a self-deprecating way and then wisely dropped the subject. Clearly, the day belonged to the master forger." Cheering fans greeted van Meegeren when he emerged from the court. He was sentenced to a year in prison and forfeiture of his wealth (except for a sizable chunk that he had settled on Johanna by the legal stratagem of divorcing her). He died two months later, of heart failure—probably, Lopez reports, as a complication of syphilis. He was fifty-eight years old. Lopez, though intent on proving van Meegeren a skunk, can't deny him a parting note of admiration: "To give him his due, he was indeed a truly brilliant fraud."

Art forgery is among the least despised of crimes, except by its victims—the identity of those victims being more than exculpatory, for many people. Art is unique among universally esteemed creative fields in its aloofness from a public audience. Its economic base is a club of the wealthy, who share power to impose or repress value with professional and academic élites. Lopez's muckraking of van Meegeren scants a fact that Dolnick merrily exploits: the forger gratifies class resentment precisely because he is a pariah. Unlike the subversive gestures of a Marcel Duchamp, say, his outrages will not become educational boilerplate in museums and universities. They are impeccably destructive, tarring not only pretensions to taste but the credibility of taste in general. The spectre of forgery chills the receptiveness—the will to believe—without which the experience of art cannot occur. Faith in authorship matters. We read the qualities of a work as the forthright decisions of a particular mind, wanting to let it commandeer our own minds, and we are disappointed when it doesn't. If we are disappointed enough, when the named artist is familiar, we get suspicious. But we can never be certain in every case that someone—a veiled mind—isn't playing us for suckers. Art lovers are people who brave that possible chagrin. ♦

# BRIEFLY NOTED

George, Being George (George Plimpton's Life as Told, Admired, Deplored, and Envied by 200 Friends, Relatives, Lovers, Acquaintances, Rivals—and a Few Unappreciative Observers), *edited by Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr. (Random House; $30).* No wonder Philip Roth, in his novel "Exit Ghost," made an elegiac set-piece of the death, at seventy-six, in 2003, of George Plimpton—the aristocratic, Zelig-like, heron-resembling founder and editor of the *Paris Review*, fearless amateur jock, inexhaustible after-dinner speaker, and New York treasure. This book resembles "Edie" in its oral-bio form. Its sometimes pitiless honesty (the two wives, though loving, are especially blunt) balances the encomiums and charming anecdotes. Plimpton, a child of privilege, made it his business to be everywhere, to see and do everything. "Marvellous!" was his credo. But, while the book does a good job of following Plimpton as he creates both his magazine and his legend, and struggles to maintain them both, the best of him may be in his highly underrated sportswriting—in "Paper Lion," "Mad Ducks and Bears," "The Bogey Man," and "Shadow Box."

Factory Girls, *by Leslie T. Chang (Spiegel & Grau; $26).* China is in the midst of history's largest human migration, a hundred and thirty million of its citizens having left their home villages in search of urban employment. Chang, an American of Chinese descent, explores the migrant experience and "the burden of being Chinese" through the lives of several young women in the industrial city of Dongguan. Their Sisyphean attempts at self-reinvention are both entertaining and poignant; the most ambitious of them achieves modest success selling dubious health products, before falling under the spell of an American raw-food guru. In her diary, she reminds herself, "We can be ordinary but we must not be vulgar." Chang's fine prose and her keen sense of detail more than compensate for the occasional digression, and her book is an intimate portrait of a strange and hidden landscape, "a universe of relentless motion."

Sea of Poppies, *by Amitav Ghosh (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $26).* Ghosh's best and most ambitious work yet is an adventure story set in nineteenth-century Calcutta against the backdrop of the Opium Wars. On the Ibis, a ship engaged in transporting opium across the Bay of Bengal, varied life stories converge. A fallen raja, a half-Chinese convict, a plucky American sailor, a widowed opium farmer, a transgendered religious visionary are all united by the "smoky paradise" of the opium seed. Ghosh writes with impeccable control, and with a vivid and sometimes surprising imagination: a woman's tooth protrudes "like a tilted gravestone"; an opium addict's writhing spasms are akin to "looking at a pack of rats squirming in a sack"; the body of a young man is "a smoking crater that had just risen from the ocean and was still waiting to be explored."

Godchildren, *by Nicholas Coleridge (St. Martin's; $25.95).* This wickedly enjoyable novel about a venal British billionaire and his godchildren shows a moribund class society being rapidly dismantled by global wealth. The property and shipping tycoon Marcus Brand's six godchildren include a Scottish aristocrat whose snobbery outstrips his dwindling inheritance, a debonair London gigolo, and a socialist Birmingham boy who pulls himself up by his bootstraps to become a capitalist with a heart of gold. While the story of who triumphs is predictable, Coleridge dissects the social mores of Cap Ferrat and Lyford Cay with skill, noting sartorial codes with the precision of Tom Wolfe. "His shirt collar and tie were several inches too wide, and his eau-de-cologne several degrees too pungent, to be worn by a gentleman," says one old-money character of a new.

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## BOOKS

# DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY

*A new novel by José Saramago.*

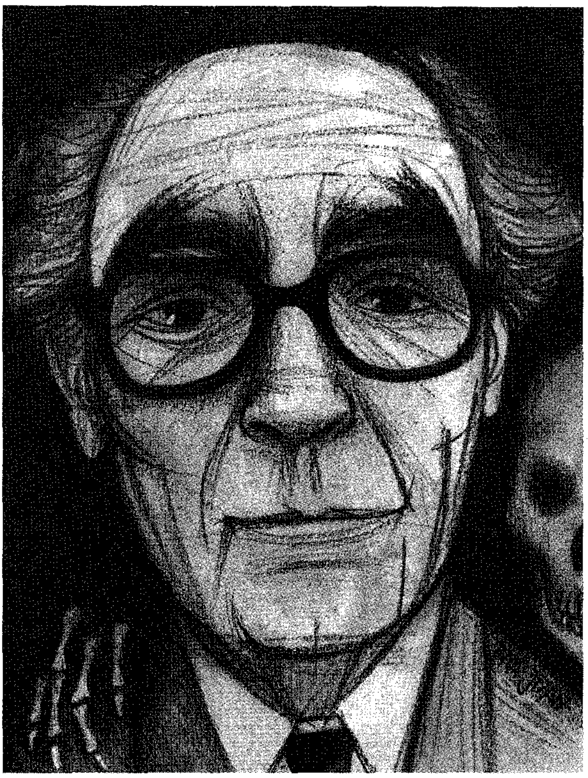
BY JAMES WOOD

The philosopher Bernard Williams once wrote a paper, "The Makropulos Case," in which he argued that eternal life would be so tedious that no one could bear it. According to Williams, the constancy that defines an eternal self would entail an infinite desert of repetitive experiences, lest the self be so altered as to be emptied of any definition. That is why, in the play by Karel Čapek from which Williams takes his title, the three-hundred-and-forty-two-year-old Elina Makropulos, having imbibed the elixir of eternal life since the age of forty-two, chooses to discontinue the regimen, and dies. Life needs death to constitute its meaning; death is the black period that orders the syntax of life.

In "Death with Interruptions" (translated, from the Portuguese, by Margaret Jull Costa; Harcourt; $24), José Saramago, a writer whose long, uninterrupted sentences are relative strangers to the period, has produced a novel that functions as a thought experiment in the Čapek/Williams field. (His novel makes no explicit allusion to either.) At midnight on one New Year's Eve, in a nameless, landlocked country of about ten million inhabitants, Death declares a truce with humanity, a self-interruption, so as to give people an idea of what it would be like to live forever. At first, of course, people are euphoric:

> Having lived, until those days of confusion, in what they had imagined to be the best of all possible and probable worlds, they were discovering, with delight, that the best, the absolute best, was happening right now, right there, at the door of their house, a unique and marvelous life without the daily fear of parca's creaking scissors, immortality in the land that gave us our being, safe from any metaphysical awkwardnesses and free to everyone, with no sealed orders to open at the hour of our death, announcing at that crossroads where dear companions in this vale of tears known as earth were forced to part and set off for their different destinations in the next world, you to paradise, you to purgatory, you down to hell.

But "awkwardnesses"—metaphysical, political, pragmatic—soon reënter. The Catholic Church is the first institution to sense a danger. The Cardinal phones the Prime Minister to point out that "without death there is no resurrection, and without resurrection there is no church." For the Cardinal, life without death is tantamount to God's willing His own demise. Life without death abolishes the soul. A panel of philosophers and clergymen is convened, and both sides agree that religion needs death "as much as we need bread to eat." Life without death is like life without God, one churchman says, because "if human beings do not die then everything will be permissible." (This is a version of the Dostoyevskian fear that without God everything is permitted.) One philosopher, sounding like the slyly secular Saramago, suggests that since death was "clearly the only agricultural implement god possessed with which to plough the roads that would lead to his kingdom, the obvious, irrefutable conclusion is that the entire holy story ends, inevitably, in a cul-de-sac."



*Saramago's narration feels modern and ancient at once.*

ANA JUAN

A country in which no one dies inevitably becomes a Malthusian zoo. Old people who were on the brink of death on New Year's Eve simply remain on the brink, frozen in their desuetude. Undertakers, those selling life-insurance policies, and the directors of hospitals and old people's homes are variously threatened with unemployment or overactivity. The state will soon be unable to pay for the maintenance of its citizens. And although this sudden utopia may now be the very best of all possible worlds, humans can always be relied upon to wreck utopias. Families with aged, infirm members realize that they need death to save them from an eternity of bedside care. Since death has not been suspended in neighboring countries, the obvious solution is to transport ailing Grandpa over the border, where death will do its business. A Mafia-like organization takes over these death runs, an operation secretly connived in by the government, since no state can afford infinite expansion. As the Prime Minister warns the King, "If we don't start dying again, we have no future."

"Death with Interruptions" is a smallish, toothy addition to a great novelist's work. It efficiently mobilizes its hypothetical test case, and quickly generates a set of sharp theological and metaphysical questions about the desirability of utopia, the possibility of Heaven, and the true foundation of religion. Recent work by Saramago has tended toward the sparely allegorical, with nameless, universal actors in place of individual characters. These books would be baldly essayistic were it not for

Saramago's extraordinary sentences, and the subtlety of their narration. In the absence of vivid fictional people, Saramago's sentences, in which a narrator or group of narrators is always strongly present, constitute a kind of community of their own: they are highly peopled.

Some of the more significant writing of the past thirty years has taken delight in the long, lawless sentence—think of Thomas Bernhard, Bohumil Hrabal, W. G. Sebald, Roberto Bolaño—but no one sounds quite like Saramago. He has an ability to seem wise and ignorant at the same time, as if he were not really narrating the stories he narrates. Often, he uses what could be called unidentified free indirect style—his fictions sound as if they were being told not by an author but by, say, a group of wise and somewhat garrulous old men, sitting down by the harbor in Lisbon, having a smoke, one of whom is the writer himself. This community is fond of truisms, proverbs, clichés. "It is said that one cannot have everything in life," the narrator of "Death with Interruptions" tells us, and he adds, "That's how life is, what it gives with one hand one day, it takes away with the other." The narrator of a previous novel announces, "Fame, alas, is a breeze that both comes and goes, it is a weather vane that turns both to the north and to the south." And elsewhere: "It has been said, from classical times onwards, that fortune favours the bold." These platitudes are neither quite validated nor disowned; they are ironized by the obvious gap that exists between the knowing postmodern Nobel laureate writing his fictions and the person or persons seemingly narrating those fictions.

The run-on style is an important part of that irony: the breathlessness lends a sense of chatty unruliness, as if different people were breaking in to have their say. A single long sentence often seems to have been written by different voices, and the unpunctuated welter allows for sly twists and turns, as when a cliché catches itself in the act of being a cliché, and atones: "Such a man, apart from rare exceptions which have no place in this story, will never be more than a poor devil, it's odd that we always say poor devil and never poor god." In the sentence about the people's early euphoria when death is suspended, notice that a poetic image for the Grim Reaper ("parca's creaking scissors") gives way to a more ordinary image ("sealed orders to open at the hour of our death") and then to a frank, weary cliché ("this vale of tears known as earth"), and that this progression allows for the simultaneous presence of the writer, who has his images, and the people he is writing about, who have theirs. And a magical exchange occurs: by the time we reach the end of that sentence about death, the fancy mythical image seems somehow much less powerful than the most banal image.

Saramago's narration thus feels modern and ancient at once. The writer is self-consciously at work, constantly drawing attention to the narration, yet the narration seems to dip easily into a universal knapsack, to flourish its bony, wise truths. It is this cunningly modest approach that allows Saramago to write his speculative and fantastical fictions as if they were the most likely events, and to give them a solid literalism—an unnamed country gripped by an epidemic of blindness, the Iberian Peninsula broken off from the European continent and turned into a huge floating island, a man walking the streets of Lisbon who is both undeniably real and a literary ghost. His work is in some ways closer to that of an ancient satirist like Lucian, whose sketches imagine people travelling to the moon or to Hades, or the gods squabbling among themselves, than to that of any contemporary novelist. When, in Saramago's new novel, Death finally decides to end her "interruption" and let mortality have its way again, the Church, which had been praying for such a restoration, is pleased: "The prayers had taken nearly eight months to reach heaven, but when you think that it takes six months to reach the planet mars, then heaven, as you can imagine, must be much farther off, three thousand million light-years from earth, in round numbers." That prodding voice, with its anti-theological bias, is reminiscent not only of Lucian but of the Lucianic Leon Battista Alberti, whose fifteenth-century satire "Momus" imagines the chaos that might ensue in Heaven if

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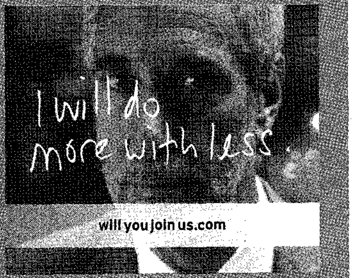
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everyone asked God to answer a prayer at the same time.

Saramago's brief novel provokes similar questions. If eternal life could not possibly work on earth, why is heavenly eternity so ardently to be desired? Perhaps it is because we desperately hope that Heaven will be the same as earth but also very different, given that man ruins Edens. For Saramago, as for Bernard Williams, the problem is not just that humans are natural-born utopia-killers; it is that eternity itself—life forever uninterrupted—seems unbearable. And Saramago does more than tease Dostoyevsky in this novel. For if the disappearance of God means that "everything is permitted," and the disappearance of death means that everything is permitted, then, by the novelist's tacit catechism, God must be death, and death must be God. No wonder religion needs death: death is the one God we can believe in.

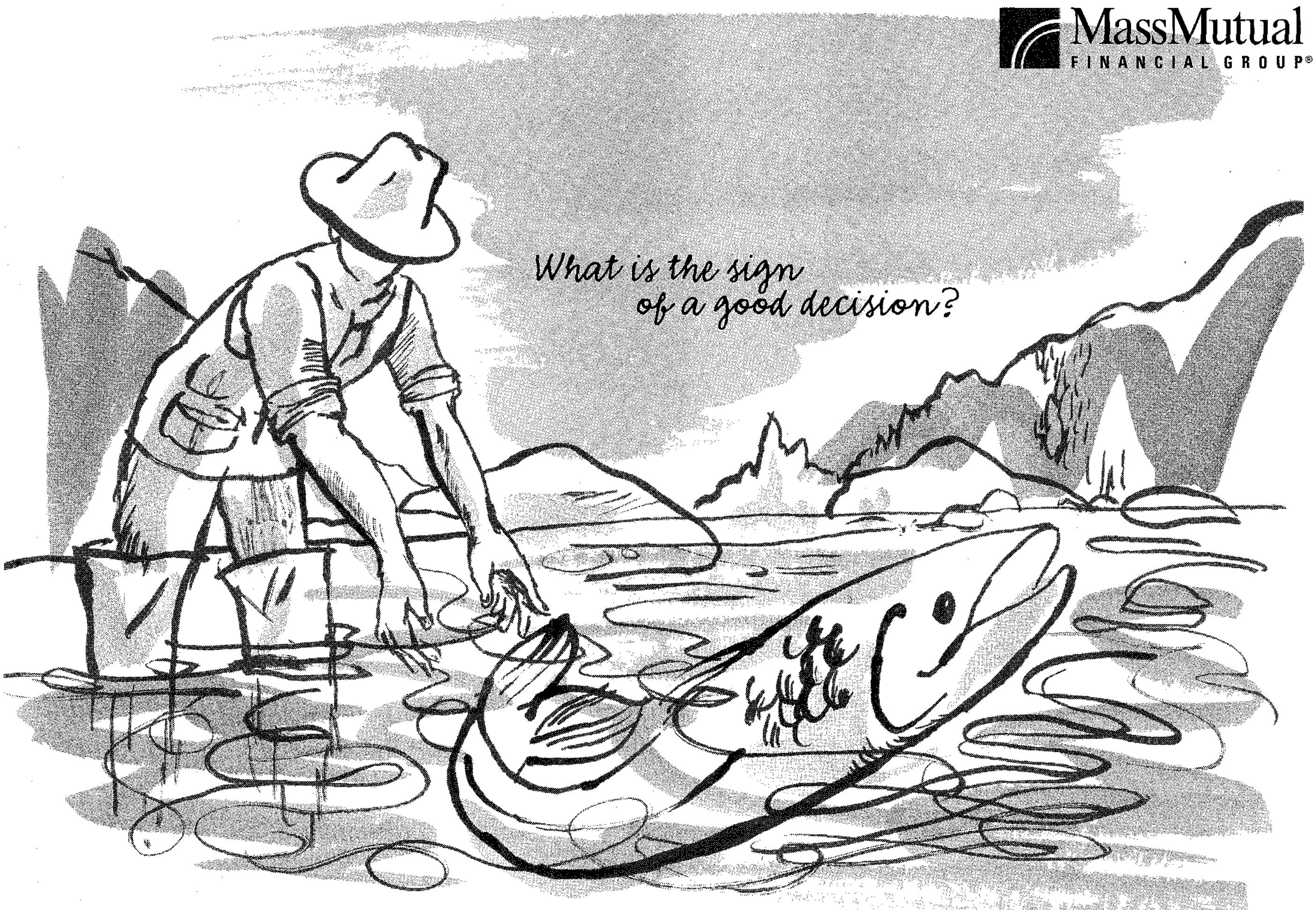
Saramago is drawn to these Gnostic inversions. In perhaps his greatest book, "The Gospel According to Jesus Christ" (1991), the novelist, characteristically, tells the story of Jesus' life and death without changing any of the famous facts, while at the same time turning the theology of the Gospels upside down. One day, Jesus' father, Joseph, overhears some soldiers talking about Herod's orders to kill all children under the age of three. He races home to hide his wife and newborn son, but neglects to warn the rest of the village. For this sin, an angel later tells Mary, Joseph will suffer. And what about my son? she asks the angel. "The angel said, A father's guilt falls on the heads of his children, and the shadow of Joseph's guilt already darkens his son's brow," Saramago writes. In time, Joseph is captured by Roman soldiers putting down a rebellion and is crucified along with thirty-nine other Jews. Jesus, in turn, becomes obsessed with a sense of inherited guilt, and with the idea, as he puts it, that "Father murdered the children of Bethlehem." On the strength of a lightning strike from the storyteller's blasphemous finger, Saramago turns a familiar theological conundrum—the "good" God who brings Jesus into the world is also the "bad" God who permits the massacre of innocent babies—into a deep crux. Suddenly, Jesus is cursed by a form of original sin, and his sacrifice on the Cross becomes not an expiation of man's sin but an inheriting of it: he is following in his father's footsteps, cursed by his patrilineage. "God does not forgive the sins He makes us commit" is how the narrator puts it. On the Cross, hearing his heavenly Father declaim from the clouds, "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," Jesus bursts out, "Men, forgive Him, for He knows not what He has done." It is the novel's final, and most wicked, inversion.

"The Gospel According to Jesus Christ" was enormously controversial in Catholic Portugal (Jesus sleeps, and lives, with Mary Magdalene), but it is the most pious of blasphemous books. Behind its savage ironies, Saramago seems to do no more than take the Incarnation as seriously as possible: if Jesus was born a man, he seems to say, then he inherits everything man is prey to, including sin, which comes from God anyway. The stakes are very high, but the authorial temperament is mild, quizzical, seasoned. And what if God were the Devil? the author seems to ask, gently peering at us through his dark-rimmed, television-size spectacles. He is in some ways the least fantastical of novelists, because he so relentlessly persists with his fictional hypotheses, following them through to large, humane conclusions. His new novel gradually becomes less and less conceptual, and increasingly affecting, without ever becoming in any conventional sense realistic, or even plausible.

He pictures Death for us as an embodied female absence, a skeleton in a sheet who lives in a frigid, subterranean room, accompanied only by her much used scythe. (He also denies her a capital "D.") After her seven months of self-interruption, this gloomy goddess sends a letter to a TV station, announcing that she is ending her experiment, because humans have acted so "deplorably." People will die again at the old rate, which is about three hundred a day. Under the new rules, those citizens whose time is up will be given one week's notice: each will receive a violet-colored letter, a notice of termination from Death herself. This apparently humane concession—the nominee now has time to take his leave, get his estate in order, and so on—is of course unbearably cruel, since most people would rather be surprised by death than condemned to it.

One such nominee, a fifty-year-old cellist, bewilders the goddess. Death has selected him for termination, but the violet-colored letter is returned to sender, again and again; the cellist seems to refuse his orders. In a series of unexpectedly beautiful scenes, Death, much perplexed, insinuates herself into the cellist's apartment, and sits quietly watching him while he sleeps; she sees how he gets up in the night to get a glass of water and let the dog out, sees a Bach suite (No. 6) on his chair, and so on. It is the cellist's time to die—"the time prescribed for them at birth has expired"—but Death seems to have no power over this "perfectly ordinary man, neither ugly nor handsome." In an earlier novel to which the new one is an obvious companion, "All the Names," a modest clerk similarly becomes obsessed with a perfectly ordinary citizen, a woman whose name on a birth certificate catches him by surprise one evening at his workplace, the Central Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths. As in the new novel, the clerk selects one citizen from the ranks of the ever-dying and living, and gradually, without ever naming her (the cellist likewise goes unnamed), endows her with metaphysical particularity.

This is what the novelist does, too: he takes a name, a character, a person, and saves her from wordless oblivion through the irradiation of words. But he can also kill her whenever he pleases: every novel is "interrupted" simply because it ends. We speak of omniscient authorial power because writers have the power of life and death over their "names." The clerk in "All the Names," who is known only as Senhor José, shares his first name with the novelist. In his new novel, Saramago again asks us to reflect on the storyteller's godlike powers. When Death's letter is published in the newspapers, a grammarian is consulted, and notes its "chaotic syntax, the absence of full stops, the complete lack of very necessary parentheses, the obsessive elimination of paragraphs, the random use of commas. . . ." Death writes like José Saramago. As Death watches the cellist drink, Saramago writes that she looked at the water "and made an effort to imagine what it must be like to feel thirsty, but failed." The reader wonders: if Death cannot imagine thirst, can she possibly imagine death? And can the novelist? One answer that Saramago offers—it is the wide, universal, antique truth toward which his complex fiction has been travelling—is that if we neither recoil from death nor religiously long to vanquish it, but, rather, accept the old actuality that in the midst of life we are in death, then death surrounds us like life, and to imagine death is really to imagine life. ♦



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## MUSICAL EVENTS

# FALSE DAWN

*The Met's take on John Adams's "Doctor Atomic."*

### BY ALEX ROSS

I first heard John Adams's "Doctor Atomic"—an opera set in the days and hours leading up to the first nuclear test, on July 16, 1945—while driving toward the patch of New Mexico desert where the detonation took place. In the course of chronicling the first production of "Atomic," at the San Francisco Opera in 2005, I had arranged to visit the Trinity site, and brought with me the composer's computer realization of his score. An eerie trip ensued. Even as the hot gleam of the highway gave way to desolate roads and fenced-off military zones, Adams's characteristic musical gestures—the rich-hued harmonies and bopping rhythms that have made repertory items of "Harmonielehre," "Nixon in China," and "Short Ride in a Fast Machine"—disintegrated into broken clockwork rhythms, acid harmonies, and electronic noise.

*The music in "Atomic" is ominous, but also uncommonly beautiful.*

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Rehearsals for the première revealed "Atomic" to be not only an ominous score but also an uncommonly beautiful one. Scene after scene glows with strange energy. There is an inexplicably lovely choral ode to the bomb's thirty-two-pointed explosive shell, with unison female voices floating above lush string-and-wind chords and glitterings of chimes and celesta. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the leader of the atomic project, and Kitty, his brilliant, alcoholic wife, sing sumptuous duets over an orchestra steeped in the decadent glamour of Wagner and Debussy. Oppenheimer's central aria, a setting of the John Donne sonnet "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," has a stark Renaissance eloquence, its melody a single taut wire. The night of the countdown is taken up with a hallucinatory sequence of convulsive choruses, lurching dances, and truncated lyric flights. After the first run-through with singers and orchestra, it seemed clear that "Doctor Atomic" was Adams's most formidable achievement to date.

Staging the opera, though, has proved a challenge. The director of the première was Peter Sellars, who has helped to create all of Adams's stage works from "Nixon" onward. Sellars also devised the libretto, sometimes basing the dialogue on the documentary record and sometimes fashioning interior monologues from Oppenheimer's favorite poets. (The physicist had the Donne sonnet in mind—"break, blow, burn, and make me new"—when he called the site Trinity.) The inaugural staging likewise wavered between literalism and fantasy. A replica of the bomb hung over the stage, and authentic-looking gizmos were scattered around the desert camp, but dancers wove through them, enacting the bustle of research, the instability of the weather, and the hazards of radiation. The action at Trinity was intercut with glimpses of Kitty Oppenheimer drinking herself into a visionary stupor back at Los Alamos; Native Americans wandered on and off, delivering apocalyptic prophecies. The result flirted with chaos, but it matched the unruly power of the score. As often with Sellars, the production evolved as it went from city to city. A newly released DVD, filmed at the Netherlands Opera last year, refines yet further the director's vision, with closeups giving emotional focus to those whirling tableaux.

Three years after the première, "Atomic" has arrived at the Metropolitan Opera—but not, curiously, in the Sellars staging. Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager, admired the music, but asked Sellars for changes that the director refused to carry out. (Relations between the two have since been repaired: Sellars is slated to direct "Nixon" at the Met, in the 2010-11 season.) So Gelb turned to Penny Woolcock, a British filmmaker who had made a tensely absorbing television adaptation of Adams's second opera, the terrorist drama "The Death of Klinghoffer." The choice seemed sound: gritty realism would be a plausible alternative to Sellars's impassioned surrealism.

Alas, it doesn't quite work. Woolcock's production comes across more as an anxious revision of the Sellars than as an independent piece. It is simpler in conception, with no dancers in sight and considerably less frenzy onstage. The sets, by Julian Crouch, are dominated by walls of cubicles in which the physicists are seen scribbling on chalkboards and catching naps. Digital projections show mathematical equations, stormy weather, and maps of Japanese bombing targets. Minatory ranks of Native American warriors confront the audience. As before, the bomb hovers above, like an evil moon. The staging is a sleek, stylish affair, but, in its blending of the mundane and the dreamlike, it's hardly a radical break from the Sellars, with the notable difference that the emotional temperature is significantly lower. This show lacks the burning conviction that drove the original. It also lacks the stamp of authenticity. For example, the male physicists wear three-piece suits, as if reporting to an ad agency. (The original production scrupulously followed Los Alamos's casual, Western style.) We end up floating in some international, twentieth-century, big-science nowhere.

"Doctor Atomic" was Woolcock's first stab at theatre direction, and her inexperience showed in some hesitant performances on opening night. The Canadian baritone Gerald Finley has sung Oppenheimer in every "Atomic" to date, and seems to have attained vocal greatness in the course of inhabiting the role. No matter what he sings, Finley supplies a fundamental warmth of tone, piercingly precise diction, and an array of mercurial inflections, whether in a new work by Kaija Saariaho or in classic fare such as Schumann's "Dichterliebe." (His new recording of the latter, on Hyperion, is among the best on disk.) In the part of Oppenheimer, Finley shows inexhaustible ingenuity in bringing to life lines that might otherwise fall awkwardly on the tongue. Early on, he sings, "I explained that the visual effect of an atomic bombing would be tremendous." The mixture of excitement and dread that he injects into the rising third and falling major seventh on "tremendous" isolates Oppenheimer in three notes.

Yet Finley seemed vaguely ill at ease on opening night. His "Batter my heart" lacked the wounded ferocity that it had in San Francisco and, even more, at a Chicago Lyric Opera performance I saw last winter. It remains a supremely eloquent piece of singing, but it exudes a kind of solemnity that afflicts the production as a whole. Most of the singers are veterans of Sellars's "Atomic": Eric Owens, by turns bluff and vulnerable as General Leslie Groves, the military head of the Manhattan Project; Thomas Glenn, youthfully ardent as Robert Wilson, who questions the wisdom of an atomic strike on Japan; Meredith Arwady, unleashing a thunderous contralto as Pasqualita, Kitty Oppenheimer's maid; and Richard Paul Fink, giving mischievous twists to the sinister basso utterances of Dr. Edward Teller. None performs quite as securely as before. Sellars, however perplexing his choices, is prized by many singers for his animating energy and his attention to detail; without him, the cast seems adrift.

New to "Atomic" is the gifted young mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, as Kitty Oppenheimer. Perhaps because she had no nostalgia for the old production, she was able to create a fresh, vital portrayal, bringing a luminous tone, a generously supported musical line, a keen sense of verbal nuance, and a flair for seduction. Even if the Oppenheimers' bedroom came out looking oddly like a suite in an Ian Schrager hotel, their duet emerged as the most psychologically cogent scene of the night—a billowing of sensual delirium into white-knuckle reality.

Purely as an experience in sound, the Met's "Atomic" was a triumph. Alan Gilbert, making his first outing as an opera conductor in New York, conducted with palpable authority, imposing order on some fiendishly tricky rhythmic passages while leaving space for the Met musicians to shine. (The horns, in particular, played heroically all night.) Gilbert won the second-biggest ovation of the evening; the biggest went to Adams, who, twenty-one years after he revolutionized American opera with "Nixon in China," finally got to take a bow at a Manhattan opera house.

Sellars, the co-creator and guiding spirit of the work, did not appear, and his absence was strongly felt. To have brought "Atomic" to the Met without him was, I believe, a mistake. But that's not to say that his is the only viable approach. I can imagine another, much more straightforward production, one that reproduces the arid blankness of the Trinity site. You would see a vast, dusty space with mountains in the far distance; a creaky tower holding the bomb aloft; a few low huts and some scientific paraphernalia; and knots of hopeful, fearful people waiting. The music would take care of the rest. ♦

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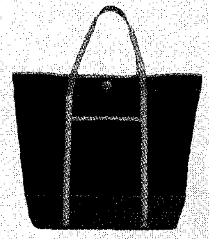

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ON TELEVISION

# LAUGHING MATTERS

*Saturday-night politics.*

BY KELEFA SANNEH

"Saturday Night Live" got a gift from Senator John McCain on August 29th, when he selected as his running mate Governor Sarah Palin: she looked like a Tina Fey character come to life. Sure enough, the show's thirty-fourth-season première, on September 13th, began with Fey, a former cast member, as Palin, and Amy Poehler, a current cast member, as Senator Hillary Clinton. Together, they delivered not quite congruent denunciations of campaign sexism. (Fey's Palin was blithe but not unkind. "Just look at how far we've come," she said, really meaning it. "Hillary Clinton, who came so close to the White House—and me, Sarah Palin, who is even closer! Can you believe it, Hillary?" The seething reply: "I cannot.") The show earned "Saturday Night Live" its highest ratings in six years. To capitalize on the political season, NBC added three half-hour Thursday-night installments to its schedule, which started on October 9th, and it seemed inevitable that the real Sarah Palin would make an appearance to confront the fake one, just as the real Hillary Clinton confronted the fake one, last spring.

Political impersonations on "Saturday Night Live" used to be a good deal more impersonal. Dan Aykroyd's version of President Carter had a half-Southern accent and a whole mustache. Chevy Chase's version of President Ford was pure whimsy, as if someone had simply said, "Jovial. Clumsy. Go!" They were making fun of Presidents, but they were also making fun of Presidential impersonation, a hoary showbiz tradition that had come to seem unhip. In the nineteen-eighties, the impressions grew more precise: there was an avalanche of Reagans, and then there was Dana Carvey, who found a quirky nerd lurking within the seemingly unquirky first President Bush. Like any regular characters on the show, the fake politicians had to be at least a little bit lovable, which is why the most successful political parodies tended to make their targets seem more sympathetic, not less. Will Ferrell played the second President Bush as a cheerful idiot who had been thrown into the deep end; he captured the winsome earnestness of a guy doing the best he can. As Bush, in a 2000 sketch, Ferrell used the non-word "strategery" to sum up his governing philosophy. Apparently, Bush liked the term: a schedule that was unearthed during the perjury trial of Scooter Libby revealed that the White House played host to at least one "strategery meeting."

McCain should be a perfect target for a "Saturday Night Live" parody: he is both the most expressive Presidential candidate in recent memory—quick to scowl, growl, or, when he's saying something that makes him uncomfortable, stumble over his words—and the gruffest. But Darrell Hammond, the cast's veteran impressionist (his President Clinton is deliciously sleazy), hasn't quite mastered him. Part of the problem might be that McCain's obvious physical characteristics, which would otherwise help Hammond earn easy laughs, are, just as obviously, unfunny: the left cheek swollen from cancer surgery, the arms stiff from war injuries.

Fred Armisen nails the minimalist speech patterns and mannerisms of Senator Barack Obama—the way he speeds up at the end of a phrase to make everything he says seem declarative, and the way he frowns as a sign that he's listening intently—but not much more; his Obama has no backstory. Comedians always claim to be equal-opportunity offenders, but comedy depends on shared assumptions, and one doesn't get the feeling that the "Saturday Night Live" staff shares many of the conservative movement's assumptions about Obama. The portrayals would be more biting—though not necessarily any funnier—if they took seriously the notion of Obama as a glib phony, a naïve dreamer, or a not-so-secret leftist. The show's best Obama humor so far came during an animated segment that was broadcast last spring. In it, Obama is

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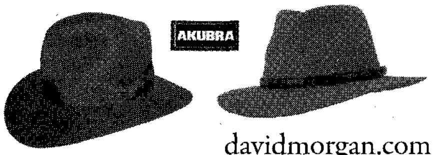

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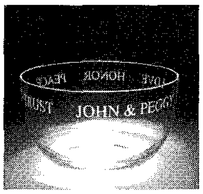

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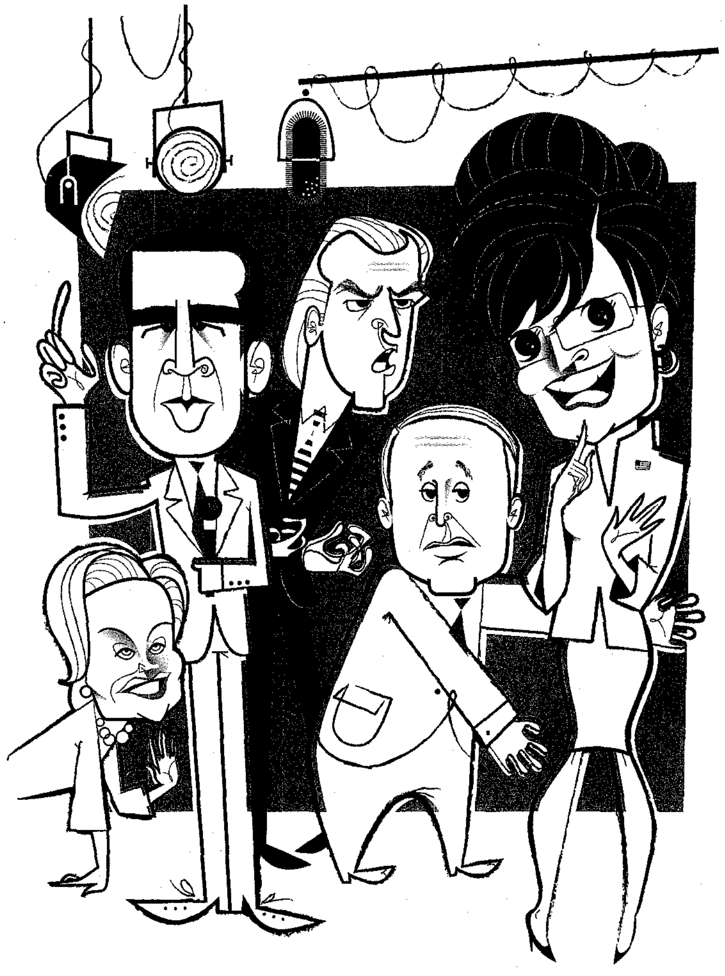
a quick-thinking superhero, scrambling to keep Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson out of sight. Looking grave, he tells Jackson, "I want to send you to Bophuthatswana, to brief me on the conditions there."

Fey, who left "Saturday Night Live" in 2006, returned as a guest host in February for a show that seemed sympathetic to Hillary Clinton's flagging campaign. It started with a Fey-less sketch in which debate moderators fawned over Obama, asking if he was comfortable. (In a real debate soon afterward, Clinton said, "If anybody saw 'Saturday Night Live,' you know, maybe we should ask Barack if he's comfortable and needs another pillow." It was funnier the first time.) Then, during the "Weekend Update" segment, Fey made a not entirely unserious pitch for Clinton: "What bothers me the most is that people say that Hillary is a bitch. And let me say something about that: Yeah, she is. And so am I!"



*Poehler, Armisen, Sudeikis, Hammond, and Fey do the candidates.*

KIRSTEN ULVE

Poehler's version of Hillary Clinton is a full character: good, smart, and diligent, but also impatient and a little bit greedy, and simultaneously angered and hurt by the dolts around her. (In a memorable Halloween episode last year, she dressed as a bride, in white, and her face fell as a stream of partygoers, including her husband, misidentified her as a witch.) By contrast, Fey's version of Sarah Palin is purely an amplification: she just turns up the glee and the swagger, the provincialism and the Alaska accent. If Palin is going to make Vice-Presidential-debate history by winking—how many times? five?—at the camera, then Fey is going to wink even more, and shoot off an imaginary gun, too. The two Palins are trying to make different points, but they're similarly outrageous, and similarly fun to watch. Fey recently called Palin "very likable," although she has also said, "I want to be done playing this lady November 5th."

The Internet has made it easy to keep up with the day's news as it happens; minor gaffes become viral video hits before the sun goes down, and the candidates have learned that, unless you're talking to a sympathetic listener—like Senator Joe Biden going on Keith Olbermann's MSNBC show, or Palin sitting down with Sean Hannity on Fox News—there's no such thing as a risk-free interview. On "The View," ABC's daytime chat show, Joy Behar breezily violated the rules of campaign-journalism etiquette when she accused McCain of using "lies" in his ads; a few minutes later, during a discussion of Roe v. Wade, Whoopi Goldberg asked McCain whether his pledge to appoint judges who "strictly interpret the Constitution" might portend a return to slavery. And when Palin agreed to be interviewed by Katie Couric she probably knew that Couric had a lingering reputation as a gentle griller; she probably didn't know that she was about to help Couric change that reputation forever.

Four years ago, newspapers were full of stories about how young people were getting their news from entertainment sources like "The Daily Show," and sometimes even "Saturday Night Live." Jimmy Fallon, who used to be Fey's co-host on "Weekend Update," once said that he learned what was happening in the world from reading the setups to his own jokes. But the news moves faster now. (A bailout skit was reëdited for NBC.com, post-broadcast, after Lorne Michaels, the show's executive producer, learned that two characters it skewered were real people.) By eleven-thirty on Saturday night, the week's memorable events have become a highlight reel, a constant loop of umbrage and enthusiasm and special pleading. The political parodies now seem to operate on the assumption that viewers, having committed the original script to memory, want to hear a line-by-line replay. During a skit on the Vice-Presidential debate, Jason Sudeikis, as Biden, offered a faux-friendly rebuke of McCain: "As my mother would say, God love him, but he's a raging maniac, and a dear, dear friend." Viewers were expected to remember the real quote: "As my mother would say, God love him, but he's been dead wrong on the fundamental issues relating to the conduct of the war." (Apparently, Biden's mother is as long-winded as he is.)

This isn't hard-hitting political satire. In fact, most of it isn't political satire at all, in the strict sense. "Saturday Night Live" treats politics less as a contest of ideas than as a cast of characters. In an age of shrinking stars and fractured media consumption, parodists have to work harder to find big targets, lest they become small themselves. And in this climate a charged-up Presidential campaign is a minor miracle: a non-stop show that just about everyone watches. No wonder "Saturday Night Live" wants to stand so close. ♦

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Kelefa Sanneh and David Denby talk about political impersonation.

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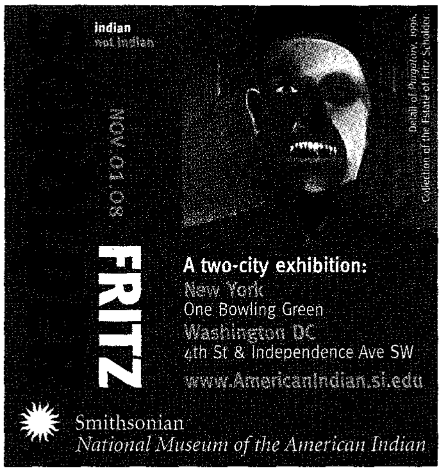
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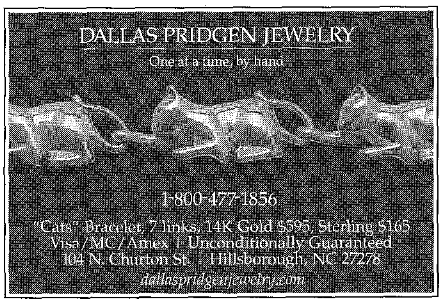
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### THE THEATRE

# GRAND ILLUSIONS

*Simon McBurney takes on "All My Sons."*

BY HILTON ALS

Arthur Miller was a fundamentally cold and moralistic writer, full of self-reproach. During his long career, the Manhattan-born playwright used his characters—a ruined salesman, a closeted dockworker, a crooked defense manufacturer, and other professional and moral failures (in Miller's world, the two were often intertwined)—in an obsessive attempt to show the ways in which the American male can be shaped and ultimately deformed by the pernicious dream of success.

Miller found his themes at home. His father, Isidore, had emigrated to New York from Poland as a child, and had worked in *his* father's clothing business, S. Miller & Sons, before founding a company of his own, Miltex Coat & Suit, which was more successful than S. Miller. But even Isidore wasn't savvy enough to save the company during the Depression, and it went bankrupt. Arthur Miller, in his 1987 memoir, "Timebends," recalled that, in this period, "my father simply went more deeply silent . . . and his mouth seemed to dry up." The less authority Isidore had in business, the less he seemed to have at home. Miller's mother, the pushy Augusta, filled her husband's mournful silence with cutting remarks about his various failures and about what might have been. A devotee of the society pages, she was also starstruck, enthralled by life on the stage.

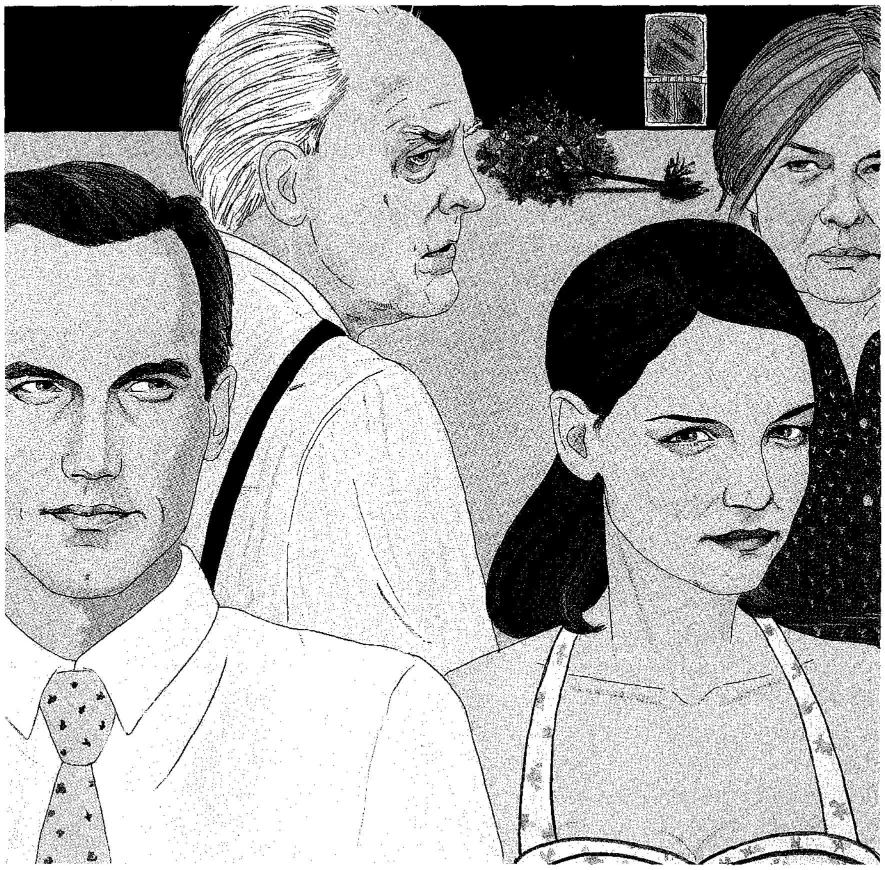
Just as Isidore was a model for Miller's failing or failed men, his more interesting female characters are often a variation on Augusta. Like her, they are hysterical, driven by recrimination and by dreams of things beyond their ken. (The circle of screaming girls in Miller's best and most affecting play, "The Crucible," from 1953, also echo Augusta's craven desire for attention and power, which she equated with male sexuality.) Kate Keller, the heroine of Miller's 1947 play "All My Sons" (now at the Gerald Schoenfeld) is motivated by fantasies and lies. Living in a middle-class enclave in an unnamed American town in the forties, she and her compulsively efficient and optimistic female neighbors (the excellent Becky Ann Baker and Danielle Ferland) are like harridans of happiness; they would commit acts of madness in order to keep their families content. Kate (Dianne Wiest) charges around the yard of the house that she shares with her husband, Joe (John Lithgow), and their son Chris (Patrick Wilson), administering advice and grape juice like the capable, postwar American mom that she feels she must be, if only to keep up appearances. Like her neighbors, Kate is unable to define herself outside the grid of convention. But she is not happy. Something terrible happened to her family before the start of the play: her other son, Larry, an Air Force pilot, failed to return from a mission in the Pacific. Was he shot down? Did he crash his own plane? Kate cannot even consider the latter possibility. Sitting in a chair, in a plain patterned dress, sensible shoes, and white ankle socks, her light-brown hair pinned back from her wide, pale face, Kate looks toward the sky with the eyes of a somnambulist drugged by grief. She clings to the hope that Larry will simply walk through the door and find life waiting for him there.

Unlike Kate, Larry's girlfriend, Ann Deever (Katie Holmes, making her Broadway début), has no illusions about Larry's return, and has already displaced her affections to Chris. Her father, who is now in prison, used to be in business with Joe; they made airplane parts, some of which were found to be faulty. The government took both men to trial, and Joe, who claimed to have been out sick at the time that the parts were manufactured, let Ann's father take the rap. Guilt, buried secrets, miscarriages of justice—the air of "All My Sons" is thick with the pretense that none of this is happening, which requires the actors to play two parts at once. Their characters must behave as though they didn't remember the past, while living in constant fear that the truth will be revealed.

Wiest and Lithgow are brilliant at this kind of double-playing. You never doubt for a minute that Joe and Kate's marriage began as a safe harbor for both of them but ended up as a compromise. Kate likes how Joe has provided for her and their boys—that's what a man is supposed to do—but her emotional and sexual energies were long ago transferred to Larry. He completed her, somehow, in a way that Chris never has or could. It's touching to see Wilson's matinée-idol looks crumple as Chris realizes that his father is a liar and a crook. When Ann's brother, George (the quietly menacing Christian Camargo), comes to town to prove that Joe approved the faulty parts, you begin to see what Chris can no longer deny: that his father's affability is as much a put-on as is his love for his sons. Joe appears to listen, but he's too self-involved to really care what anyone else is up to. Lithgow manages to humanize Joe in a way that Miller did not; his Joe doesn't mean to be selfish, but his guilt and coverups leave him entirely preoccupied.

Readers of Ibsen will recognize something of his 1877 play "Pillars of Society" in "All My Sons." As Mary McCarthy pointed out in an essay on theatrical realism, Miller's faulty airplanes are like Ibsen's "coffin ships, rotten, unseaworthy vessels caulked over to give an appearance of soundness . . . a symbol of the inner rottenness of bourgeois society." Early in his career, Miller acknowledged Ibsen as a master, and it's not difficult to see what sparked his interest: the clear line that Ibsen drew between right and wrong, and his distinct lack of subtlety. The characters in "All My Sons" are essentially ideological constructions; one can barely feel the blood beneath the rhetoric. As a result, the show is a directorial challenge. It's a stretch to imagine anyone doing a better job with it than Simon McBurney does here. He draws out the play's emotional and intellectual content by removing it from its naturalistic fustiness. The only set to speak of in his staging is the rear wall of the Keller home, and a tree that has fallen in the yard, a symbolic metaphor for the Keller family. McBurney's production reminds one of Jed Harris's influential 1938 take on Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," and of Lars von Trier's 2003 film "Dogville"—works in which we were made acutely aware of the stage as a stage, of the set as a set. The action of "All My Sons" doesn't begin with a raised curtain. Instead, the actors walk onstage together. They gaze out at the audience as Lithgow reads the stage directions—"The back yard of the Keller home . . . August of our era"—and then disperse to the wings, where we can see them, waiting to come on and watching the action unfold with us. When an actor gets his cue, he walks toward the stage slowly, expressionless. Only on joining the action does he become fully animated, a "character." McBurney isn't overemphasizing the play's theatricality—he's giving the production the only theatricality it has. Reading Miller's works, one gets the sense that he didn't approve of theatre per se; it was too frivolous an enterprise for him, so he had to kill the spectacle with meaning. By filtering Miller's flat world through his own vision, McBurney gives us the distance we need from Miller's agitprop; he also relieves the text of some of its finger-pointing.

Shortly after the acclaimed opening of "All My Sons" on Broadway, Miller, seeking a return to normalcy, applied for a job through the New York State Employment Service and was sent to a factory in Long Island City, where he worked for minimum wage assembling beer-box dividers. Later, he wrote of the experience, "The grinding boredom and the unnaturalness of my pretense to anonymity soon drove me out of that place. . . . I was not the first to experience the guilt of success (which, incidentally, was reinforced by leftist egalitarian convictions). . . : such guilt is a protective device to conceal one's happiness at surpassing others, especially those one loves, like a brother, father, or friend. It is a kind of payment to them in the form of a pseudo remorse." What a pity that Miller had to write so many plays—a form that did not come naturally to him—in order to inspire our interest in his work in the one genre at which he excelled: the memoir. ◆


*Wilson, Lithgow, Holmes, and Wiest in Arthur Miller's 1947 play.*

LARA TOMLIN

THE CURRENT CINEMA

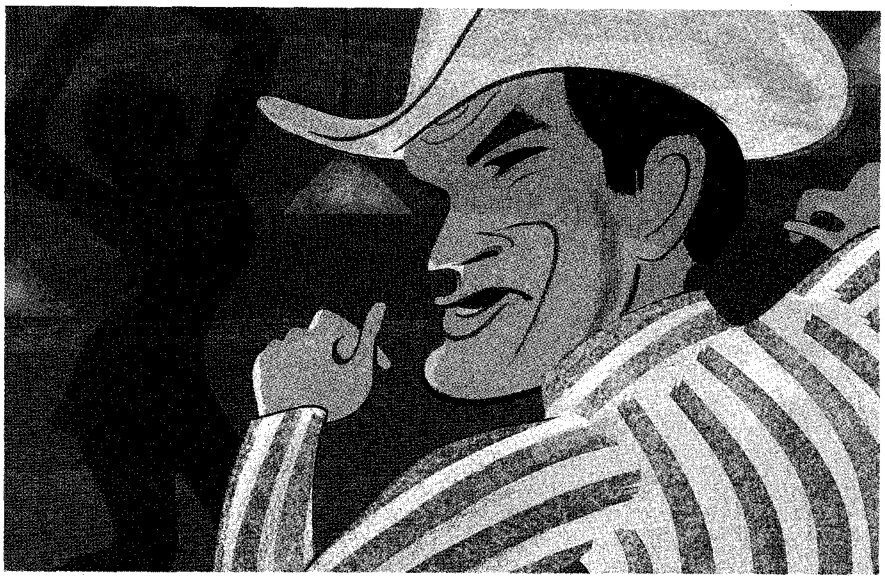
# TROUBLED SONS

*"W." and "Changeling."*

BY DAVID DENBY

Oliver Stone's "W.," a dramatized portrait of a hollow shell named George Bush, is a discomforting experience for a lot of reasons, of which the most important, perhaps, is that Stone brings us in close to the President without giving us any reason to care about him. Back in 1995, Stone made us heed, even feel for, the tormented soul of Richard Nixon; the expanded director's cut of "Nixon" (recently released on DVD) looks stronger than ever as a portrait of an intelligent, capable man (Anthony Hopkins) rotting from the inside. In "W.," however, George W. Bush (Josh Brolin) comes off as a grinning frat boy who covers his easily bruised feelings with swaggering bravado. Even if the real Bush is as simple as that (which I doubt), he's still a lousy movie character—an inadequate protagonist in his own life story. Clinging to externals, Brolin thrusts out his chin and flexes his shoulders; he walks crotch forward, like a dismounted broncobuster; and he speaks in short gusts, as if each little group of words were a shot from a Colt .45. Brolin can't get below the surface, but I'm not sure that any actor could—the way the movie has been conceived, there are no depths to plumb. Stanley Weiser's screenplay hits the Freudian family-drama aspects of the Bush saga in the most obvious ways: the hard-drinking, pleasure-loving scapegrace son can never get enough approval from his stiff-jointed father, George Herbert Walker Bush (James Cromwell), who talks of the family tradition as if it were a bank vault the boy was robbing. Cut down by Poppy again and again, the young man somehow finds God, discovers ambition, and feels at ease, at last, as he redoes his father's Iraq war as a reckless adventure. What's missing from "W.," however—what would have made the movie fascinating and not merely a hammer blow to an already expiring Presidency—is the cunning that many have noticed in Bush. Despite his family's misgivings, the actual W. became both governor and President, whereas the man at the center of this movie strikes you as someone who could maybe get elected social director of a country club.

Stone sets Bush's upward progress in a double frame: the outer frame is Bush in a baseball cap walking in the empty outfield of the Texas Rangers' ballpark when he owned the club, in the nineteen-nineties. In his fantasies, vast crowds adore him. The inner frame is Bush the first-term President at work—a series of meetings, leading up to the Iraq invasion, and then its aftermath, with the ruling circle of Dick Cheney (Richard Dreyfuss), Colin Powell (Jeffrey Wright), Donald Rumsfeld (Scott Glenn), Condoleezza Rice (Thandie Newton), George Tenet (Bruce McGill), Paul Wolfowitz (Dennis Boutsikaris), and Karl Rove (Toby Jones). From the meetings, Stone jumps back to scenes of the President's young manhood—the sloshed fraternity initiation rites at Yale, a night in jail, fleeting jobs, much gambling and mashing of front lawns with cars. In the most effective of these moments, Bush meets the young librarian Laura Welch (Elizabeth Banks) at a Texas barbecue, and Stone, working with a handheld camera, gets an easy, flirtatious conversational rhythm going between the two. Bush is self-deprecating and rakish, and, for a moment, almost likable. Later, after endless guzzling of Jack Daniel's straight from the bottle, he is struck down by God during his daily three-mile run, and is born again. A wormy Karl Rove, alternating between flattery and contempt, teaches Bush what to say in public, and his political career takes off.


*Josh Brolin as the young George W. Bush in Oliver Stone's movie.*

ERIC PALMA

Why did Stone make the movie? He doesn't discover anything new. He and Bush are the same age (sixty-two), and they entered Yale at the same time (1964), but he feels no kinship with Bush, as he clearly did with the scuzzy but canny journalist Richard Boyle, in "Salvador" (1986), and with the embittered antiwar veteran Ron Kovic, in "Born on the Fourth of July" (1989). Cold disgust—unless it leads to comedy—is probably not the most productive attitude to maintain toward your leading character. Stone seems to be making a kind of indictment of the American people: this man—this soulless *nothing*—is what you voted for. But "W." feels poorly timed: too late to have any effect on the public, most of whom long ago checked out on the President, and too early to provide more than a schematic interpretation of who he is.

Making a dramatic film about a sitting President and his advisers is an awkward task. In order to get all the key players into the decision to invade Iraq, Stone and Weiser have had to combine many meetings, many memos and small conversations. Gathered together, the characters say their famous lines ("slam dunk," "drain the swamp," "one per cent chance," and so on), but they seem, oddly, to be quoting themselves rather than working through their ideas. Except for a few acid exchanges between Cheney and Powell, who comes off better than he deserves, the meetings feel like scenes from a didactic school play: this is how we went wrong. Yet Richard Dreyfuss, hunching over and baring his teeth like a shark cruising off a Martha's Vineyard beach, does a wicked impersonation of Cheney. His relish for the part suggests that the movie should have been done not as an earnest bio-pic but as a satirical comedy—as a contemporary "Dr. Strangelove," with a cast of satyrs and clowns.

Set in the late nineteen-twenties and early thirties, in middle-class Los Angeles, when ruby-lipped women wore long coats and cloche hats, and cars were square-backed, dark, and dignified, Clint Eastwood's new movie, "Changeling," is calm and smooth. As a piece of filmmaking, "Changeling" is both impressive and monotonous. The trouble with period movies made by talented craftsmen who are serious about authenticity and consistency is that no one wants to mess up the shots. That sense of overcontrol accounted, I believe, for the disappointment that many felt last year in Ang Lee's period movie "Lust, Caution," which, apart from its convulsive sex scenes, seemed to take place under glass. "Changeling" isn't quite as static as that, but I wish that Eastwood and the writer, J. Michael Straczynski, had pushed deeper into the perverse strangeness of their story, which is based on actual events. In March, 1928, a telephone-company supervisor and single mother, Christine Collins (Angelina Jolie), returns home from work and finds an empty house—her nine-year-old son, Walter, has disappeared. After months of lackadaisical investigation, the Los Angeles police, who have a serious public-relations problem (there's been a lot of corruption and shootings), triumphantly produce a child, who was found in Illinois. The boy looks like Walter, but he isn't. When Christine protests, the captain in charge of the case, J. J. Jones (Jeffrey Donovan), accuses her of being irresponsible and emotionally unstable. Jones hires medical hacks to conspire in the charade of the false Walter, finally throwing Christine into a police-run psycho ward, where she's threatened with shock therapy if she doesn't play along.

"Changeling" is an austerely made feminist protest drama. In the beginning, everyone condescends to Christine as a woman, and therefore as someone of inferior intelligence and will. Angelina Jolie has said that she was attracted to the story of Christine's refusal to knuckle under and of her martyrdom, and she stays firmly in character as a person who's stubborn and hardworking but not terribly bright—she is strong enough to look after herself and her boy but ill equipped to take on male authority. Tears and trembling and fear alternate with bursts of courage. In all, Jolie gives a skilled and selfless performance, but it doesn't have an interesting corner in it. If Christine was not the kind of woman to turn logic and scorn on the arrogant men oppressing her, then couldn't she at least have some desires, some temperament? She has only one dimension, as a faultless, fighting mom, and she is aided by an equally uncomplicated guardian angel, Reverend Gustav Briegleb (John Malkovich), a severe and entirely impersonal Presbyterian minister who hates the Los Angeles police, and sees Christine as a tool to beat them with. The two of them make a very proper and dull pair of collaborators.

"Changeling" is beautifully wrought, but it has the abiding fault of righteously indignant filmmaking: it congratulates us for feeling what we already feel—in this case, contempt for psychiatry used as coercion and for long-discredited male-chauvinist attitudes. There is a second layer of narrative—a lunatic with an axe out in the desert near Riverside is kidnapping and murdering little children, one of whom may be Walter. But Eastwood finds himself in a bind: he doesn't want to exploit the gruesome material, or even let us see it too clearly, since killing children, as a movie spectacle, doesn't fit well with the delicate emotions aroused by a woman longing for her son. Eastwood and Straczynski settle for a methodical working out of the historical narrative—Christine's legal strike against the police and the trial of the murderer. The moral, emotional, and dramatic issues are settled, and then the movie, reverently chronicling Christine's apotheosis, ambles on for another forty minutes. ♦

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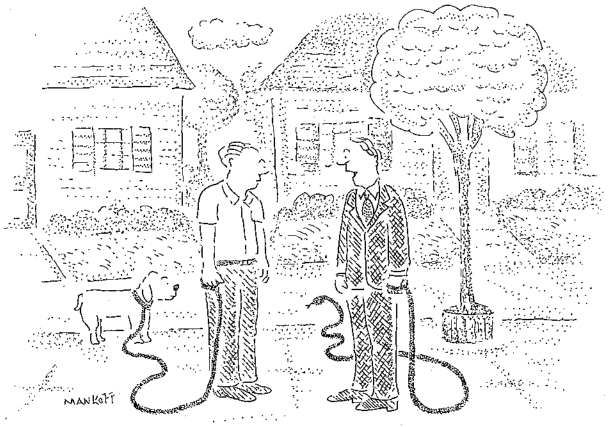
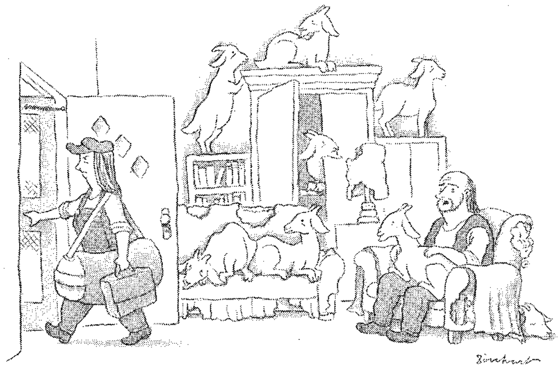
*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Farley Katz, must be received by Sunday, October 26th. Finalists in the October 13th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 10th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.*

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Don't look now, but I believe your snake is strangling that dog."*
Samantha Church, Chicago, Ill.



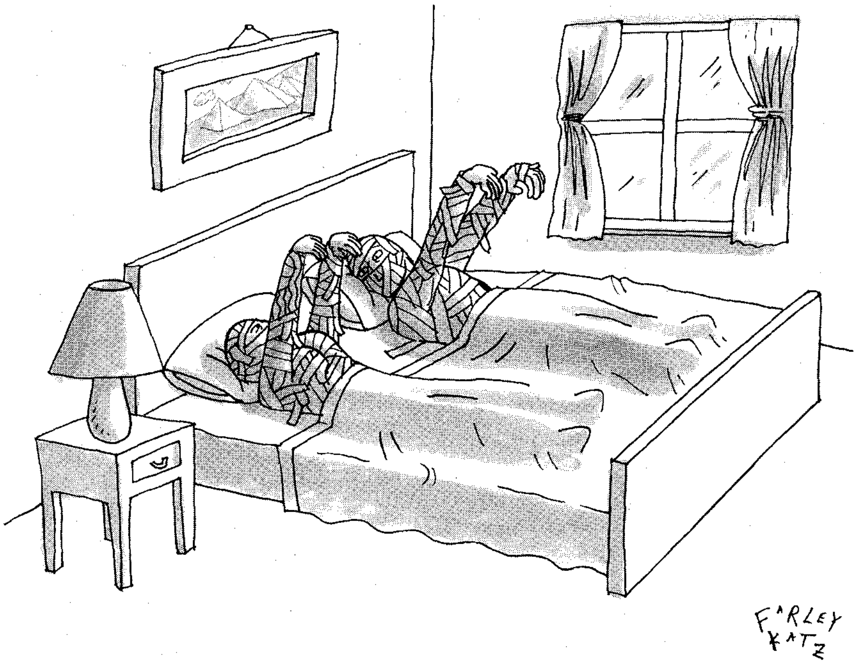
### THE FINALISTS

*"Come sweater season, you'll be back."*
Travis Gosselin, Chicago, Ill.

*"You're the one who left your fertility drugs on the counter."*
Andy Wehrley, New York City

*"Could you bring me back a goat?"*
Clif Dickens, Lexington, Ky.

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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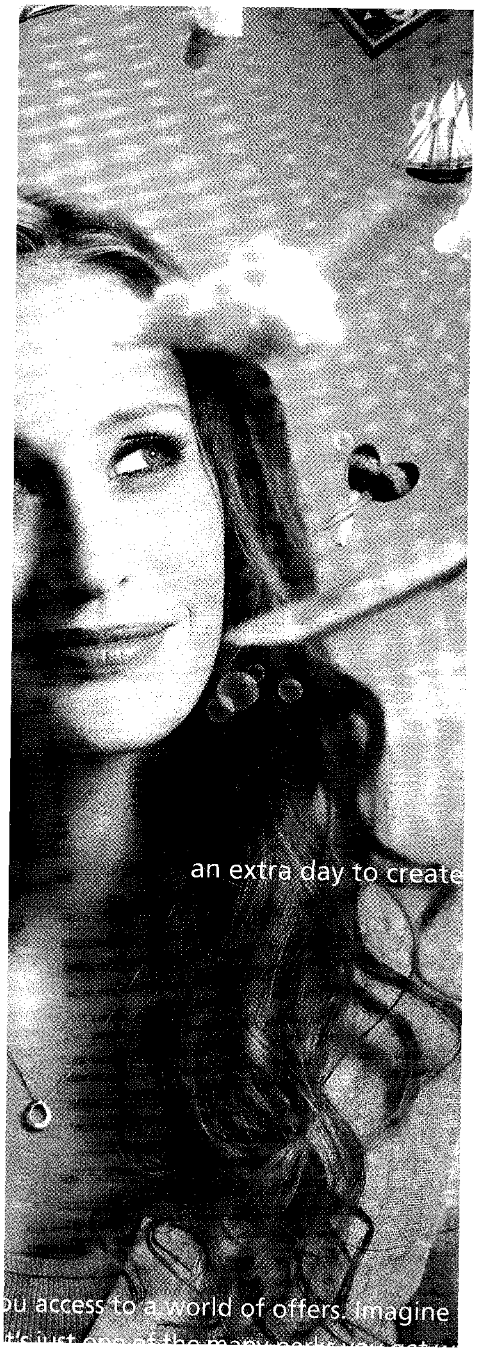
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